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THE WANDERINGS OF A  
TEMPORARY WARRIOR







A HILL PICKET ON THE BALUCHISTAN FRONTIER.



# THE WANDERINGS OF A TEMPORARY WARRIOR

*A TERRITORIAL OFFICER'S NARRATIVE  
OF SERVICE (AND SPORT) IN THREE  
CONTINENTS*

BY

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*TO*  
*MY FATHER AND MOTHER*

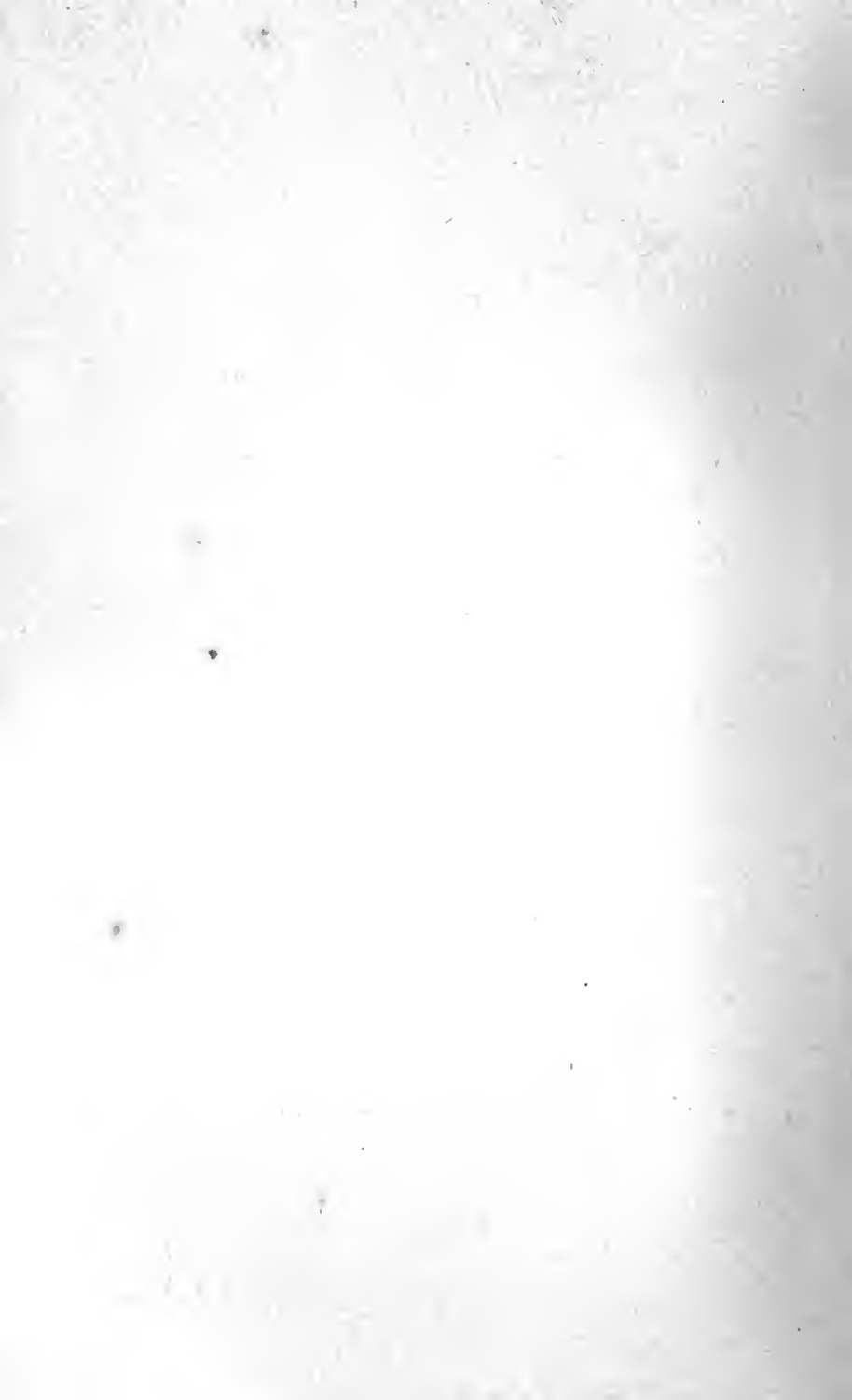
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## CHAPTER I

FROM WINCHESTER TO INDIA

*August, 1914—January, 1915*

“Thunder of thoroughfares; trumpets that blow  
To battle . . .”

—*Longfellow.*

THE outbreak of the Great War naturally caused local scares, many of them ludicrous in character. The formation of a large camp at Winchester, twenty miles away from my home, was held, on high local military authority, to threaten the gravest danger, not only to the morals of that city, but even to those of our own households. Again, it was supposed that flour and other commodities would soon be unobtainable, and a council of war was held, presided over by a local nobleman and a Major-General fresh from Egypt, at which it was decided to buy large quantities of flour and cheese, and store them against impending famine. Volunteers were called for to guard the railway bridges in the vicinity, and some of us spent a night on a lonely bridge, on the Hampshire North Downs, only to incur the wrath of the railway authorities for “butting in” when we were not wanted. But this, and similar incidents, at least served as a prologue to the more serious duties many of us were fated to take up a little later in so many different parts of the world.

Soon afterwards a journey to Louth in Lincolnshire obtained for me the promise of a

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commission in a Hampshire Territorial Cyclist Battalion stationed there, on condition that a month's training was put in with the Inns of Court O.T.C. in London.

That month proved interesting in many ways. It probably would not have been possible, at any time, in any nation's history, to have found a finer body of young men—the very pick and flower of youth—than that assembled at Headquarters in Lincoln's Inn at the opening stage of the Great War, when really keen volunteers were coming in, and the O.T.C. was somewhat exclusive. But the meshes of this net had very soon to be enlarged. Indeed, in that short month a marked falling off took place in the character and class of recruit.

Being over thirty-five years of age, the extreme age limit at that time, the promise of a commission stood as my only passport to membership of this happy band. Those young lives have melted away like last year's snow on many a stricken field, but it is safe to wager that they each and all died nobly, and that each was the very apotheosis of British manhood at its best.

This is, however, a purely personal narrative—a sort of military itinerary—written to give the reader some idea of the widespread service which the Territorial Force was eventually called to face before the advance to the Rhine put a term to its usefulness. And it is here, for this reason, that I would tender apology for the frequent presence of the personal pronoun.

We were formed into platoons, and picked up the elements of drill in a surprisingly short time. The quiet gardens of the Temple, Lincoln's Inn and Gray's Inn, resounded with the raucous shout of the Drill Sergeant, and envious barristers from my old Chambers came to see us "Standing Load" and "Form Fours." A General came to inspect us,



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and as he passed, be-corsetted and monocled, our irreverent Squad Commander whispered to us "What a disgusting sight!" The old military tradition of awestruck panic which should have heralded the appearance of a "Brass Hat" was no part of the make up of this new army.

Just as this strenuous month was about to elapse two events occurred which had considerable bearing on my future career in the Army. I was unexpectedly, and unconditionally, offered a commission in a Territorial Infantry Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment; whilst, almost simultaneously, I was informed by the then C.O. of the Cyclist Battalion that he considered me too old for him.

Needless to say the new offer was closed with; more particularly as the Headquarters of my new battalion were then at Winchester, only twenty miles from my home, and it was, moreover, my proper Territorial Battalion.

Matters thus narrowed themselves down to an order for uniform, and four days later I had joined up at Winchester. But one is apt to forget the trials a new uniform brings with it, and the bashfulness it engenders in the High Street of a city that has become packed with saluting soldiery, of which a large proportion are just back from India, and still in khaki drill kit.

Within a few minutes of arrival I had been dumped down in a Lecture Room where the C.O. was holding forth on musketry, and cognate subjects, to an assembly of officers. My new comrades struck me at first, and forcibly, as rather too young to assimilate such an old bird as myself. My fears proved, however, quite groundless. At that early period nearly all who joined up were quickly welded together in a fellowship which the common purpose rendered binding; and of all those officers assembled

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at Winchester I was eventually the only one left to return from the battalion, then forming a part of the Army of the Rhine in April, 1919. I had, thus, returned to a spot full of old associations, for I was now but a stone's throw from the school at which I had first learned to carry a rifle.

We now had much hard work, and an infinity of drill. But, even then, the movements of slow-going Hampshire men seemed slack compared with the O.T.C.

Troop trains ran through the town all night long, bound either South or East, but we supposed that we were destined to defend our Eastern shores, *if* only we could get full equipment; for as a fact we only possessed, at that time, about half the full tale of rifles to our numbers. At this stage an Expeditionary Company was formed—with myself as one of the Platoon Commanders—whose special duty it was to move off, fully equipped, at a moment's notice.

We were at last ordered to Redhill, and I received instructions to entrain my platoon at two a.m. So, rising at the appointed hour I sallied forth to my first piece of serious duty, but only to find my platoon-billet shrouded in complete darkness. A horrible suspicion naturally seized me that I had missed the move in some unaccountable way, and had, therefore, been left behind. Though old in years, I was, at this stage, a very young and anxious-minded subaltern!

A rush to the station found all quiet, and a Corporal was unearthed from behind a rain-sodden railway wagon, who apparently knew nothing. At last a signalman pushed his head out of his box to inform me that no battalion had left the station that morning, but that the battalion which was to go had had its movement-orders cancelled.

So there was nothing for it but to repair for-

lornly to Battalion Headquarters, and answer the challenge of the sentry, who also told me that our orders had been cancelled about eight p.m. on the previous evening. So I returned to my billet, knocked up the master of the house, who was not best pleased in the circumstances to see me again, and retired to bed. Next day my Company Commander was genuinely apologetic, for he had forgotten to tell the Orderly Corporal to warn me of the cancellation.

It would be possible to multiply instances of sudden alarms, marchings and counter-marchings, young officers turning up, armed to the teeth, ready to start at an instant's notice for unknown destinations. The natural jumpiness of the times was somewhat fostered by an Adjutant fond of jumpy stunts. Our Colonel, too, had a passion for night operations, which took us out to "Oliver's Battery" when the labours of the day should have been over. I found this passion very prevalent at intervals in the Army.

Then came an event which altered the course of so many of our military careers. We were asked to volunteer for service in India.

Now most of us were enlisted for home service, and there was also a strong home-keeping sentiment in the battalion. But various devices were adopted to make the prospect appear desirable. Senior officers, who had never been there, were sent round to paint the East in glowing colours. They represented it more or less as a Cook's Tour at Government expense, with, as an added inducement, Malta, Gibraltar and Aden as part of a six months' itinerary when the war would be over and we should return to our happy homes.

It is scarcely to be supposed that this kind of materialistic appeal really went down with the Hampshire man. Some of those in authority still

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seem incapable of understanding that an appeal to the heart, or the mind, will, with the average Englishman, carry far greater weight at great crises. In view, however, of the ultimate history of my battalion I record this appeal here, that the reader, who follows this patchwork narrative to its conclusion, may see how far these fair promises were redeemed.

In any case, and in spite of advice to the contrary from my Company Commander, I volunteered for India, a country I had never hoped, or wished, to see; and it is only right to here register the conviction that those who did volunteer for the East in those days did so mostly from patriotic motives. It was a great tearing up at the roots for them, and, though they have received no medal for service in 1914 in strange and unaccustomed lands, they have at least a quiet feeling that they met the occasion in a proper way.

We expected to start soon after Christmas, and were granted four days "Indian" leave. On return to duty one of our officers told me that we were off to Quetta on the morrow, and had to get all our kit packed by three p.m. that day. This was by way of being a thunderbolt. Quetta! Where was it? I seemed to have heard of it. Yes! Of course!

" Jack Barrett went to Quetta  
Because they told him to."

And there was something not very satisfactory about his going.

" Jack Barrett went to Quetta  
And there gave up the ghost.

And Mrs Barrett mourned for him  
Five lively months at most.

## FROM WINCHESTER TO INDIA

And when the last Great Bugle Call  
Adown the Hurnai throbs,  
And the last grim joke is entered  
In the big black book of jobs,  
And Quetta graveyards give again  
Their victims to the air,  
I shouldn't like to be the man  
Who sent Jack Barrett there.'"<sup>1</sup>

On December 12th, 1914, a dripping, misty morning, we entrained quietly at Winchester, with no relatives to see us off, and no excitement of any kind. "Not a dog barked at our going."

We got aboard the *Caledonia* at Southampton, put to sea and wallowed all that night in the Channel, waiting for other ships of the convoy. We had a fairly rough time in the Bay and were rather sea-sick, but soon got used to ship's routine, and managed to do our turn between decks as troop-deck-officer, and officer of the Watch, without complete loss of internal control. On the whole we enjoyed the closely packed voyage—with two and a half battalions aboard—but touched land nowhere, excepting at Port Said, during our month at sea.

And, as invariably happens, the officers soon discovered each other's idiosyncrasies. We found that X. was encyclopædic. That all the classical lore hanging round the islands of the Mediterranean was an unsealed book to him. We gasped at his erudition, till a man of enterprise discovered his guide-book! Z., on the other hand, was a man of the world, a thorough, good chap, overflowing with bonhomie, "an addition to any mess." Later, however, the bonhomie was discovered to wear thin, and the mot went round. "Why is Z. like Lord Nelson?" "Because he expects every man to do *his* duty." The majority, however, adopted no pose, and could be relied on, as events proved, in the crises of life and death.

<sup>1</sup> From "Departmental Ditties" (Rudyard Kipling).

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At the entrance to the Canal we passed the convoy of transports bringing home the troops from India which our "Wessex Division" were going out to relieve. There was much mutual cheering, and "Hail and Farewell" from the different troop decks. "Morituri te salutant" might well have been the message they passed to us.

In the Red Sea, on Christmas Day, the men had their Christmas dinner. The survivors will probably not forget it. The meat was outrageously high and quite uneatable, and some disaster had overtaken the pudding. The best we could do was to promise a real second Christmas edition when we reached Quetta, a promise which was faithfully kept.

At the end of the month we found ourselves opening Bombay Harbour, and it was with feelings of adventure and curiosity that we steamed up to our moorings.

From here the boat took us on to Karachi, where we landed on January 11th, 1915, and at once entrained. We were met by a smart-looking Captain of the Somerset Light Infantry, who had been detailed to act as our guide through the Sind Desert, and thereafter to become our guide, philosopher and friend for the first months of our sojourn in the East.

Captain Worrall was a good type of the old regular and "Contemptible" Army officer. Eight battalions of Regulars were kept intact to form the backbone of the Indian garrison till wellnigh the end of the war, and the Somersets, deeply cursing their fate, were among them. With the drill book at his finger-ends our instructor, unsparing of himself and others, was well fitted to inspire both awe and affection in the breasts of Platoon Commanders. He breathed efficiency, and deep knowledge of the handling and care of men.

Breakfast in the desert in the early morning,

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when we turned out of the troop train and stretched our legs, was a fresh experience, and the cool morning in a sun-heated land a wonderful time, unequalled under Western skies.

Out came the "Dixies" as soon as the train halted, and the Company Cooks were soon busy making tea, while the men lined up in their "messes," and were served out with rations and mugs of strong "char" as we now learned to call it. Officers turned out in pyjamas, or uniform, if time allowed, to see their men fed, and the train, the only visible object to break the monotonous flatness of the terrain, patiently awaited our pleasure.

We were now travelling through Sind, and after three days of it found ourselves running through red sandstone rocks, scarred and twisted into fantastic shapes, and entering the Bholan Pass at so steep a gradient that two engines were barely sufficient to pull us. But we gained at last the tableland, with its five thousand feet of altitude, on which Quetta lies, and came well within sight of our future home.

## CHAPTER II

### BALUCHISTAN

*January, 1915—June, 1916*

“ With me along the strip of herbage strown,  
That just divides the desert from the sown.”

—*Omar Khayyám.*

ON detraining it appeared that the whole of Quetta had turned out to welcome and get a look at us, and no doubt considered “the show worth the money.” At any rate what they did see emerge from the troop-train was a bedraggled, travel-worn battalion, many of whom had palpably handled rifles for the first time on the boat, with topees either bound round in fantastic shapes with home-made pagris, or with none at all. The baggage guard, which it fell to my lot to command, was mostly composed of young boys, who could hardly “pile arms” to get ready for their duties. It is to be recorded as fortunate, before such an audience, that those rifle-stacks did not collapse on the platform.

Bands of every regiment played us a welcome, and Staff Officers came and offered assistance. Our Commanding Officer was eventually supplied with a restive horse, from whose back he found it almost impossible to deliver a single word of command. In fact, everything conspired to give Quetta a poor impression of the first “Territorials” to arrive in that desert land.

In after years Quetta residents would say, “Do



you remember your first arrival in Quetta?" It evidently left an indelible impression, and must have become a landmark in Quetta history.

We were taken over holus-bolus by our military conductor, and a staff of about ten "regular" N.C.O.'s, who got to work and soon smartened us. This was done to such good tune that, after our first year's training, there was probably no more efficient Territorial Battalion in India. Quetta enjoys this advantage, among others, that drilling and training, owing to the perpetual fine weather, can be carried on practically all the year round. Our material was at least good and keen, the instructors were of the old army—that army which nearly perished at Mons—and the result of uninterrupted training was, therefore, a foregone conclusion.

Before it got too hot we went into camp at Chasma Tangi, about seven thousand feet above sea level. A more delightful camp we never had, and the battalion that returned from it was hard, and fit for anything.

Tents were pitched on flat ground, surrounded by rugged hills, which lent themselves to the practice of mountain warfare. The whole science of hill picketing and supports was explained to us and carried out with great zest; the men becoming as active as mountain goats, and quite fearless on heights. Close to camp was a natural bathing pool, and to the westward the imposing mass of Zahr Gunn towered up to the sky.

Our three weeks of battalion training acted, indeed, like a charm. But only a little later the heat became very great, and drill on the Maidan, at eleven a.m., a burden: the consequence being that the young troops became, at this stage, more nearly insubordinate than they ever were before, or since.

Nor was it long before we discovered our fate as a battalion, and to a unit—which had really

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become a unit—it was distinctly unwelcome. We received orders to send a draft of two hundred of all ranks to reinforce our sister Territorial Battalion in Mesopotamia. There was great keenness to volunteer, and we saw some of our very best taken from us. These two hundred sailed in October, 1915, and saw the early fighting, during which the hardships were probably greater than on any other front. In any case they won golden opinions, but many of them were invested with Townshend at Kut, and languished for years in Turkey. We, thus, became a “drafting” battalion at the same time as an Indian Garrison Battalion, which meant working double tides.

Our Divisional General, Sir Malcolm Grover, K.C.B., who made a farewell speech to this draft, said that he was certain they would do themselves credit, and that he would follow their doings with interest, he “might even say with affection.” These were no idle words, for he always showed the utmost interest and keenness in all that belonged to our battalion. By his desire I subsequently kept him posted in our doings while on active service, and will quote, in the proper place, a letter which reached me in Germany, as an example of his real interest in our subsequent history.

Shortly after the departure of this draft I had my first experience of chikor shooting. Early in September we obtained the allotment of a well-known shoot in the surrounding hills to the north-west of Quetta. The place was known as “Murghi Kotal” or “Hill of the Fowl.” We drove in a gharri to the forts which lie a few miles outside the town, and were built to counter the possibility of Russian invasion; met there a party of wild-looking Pathans, and a drove of donkeys, who were destined to act as shikaris, and to carry our transport respectively.

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With them we advanced right up into the hills, by water-tracks, for some six miles, and came, at length, worn out, to a deep valley completely shut in between precipitous hills; that on the south being Takatoo, a well-known feature in the Quetta landscape. In this valley, under some apricot trees, and close to a huge sacrificial-looking stone, we pitched our tents. In the waning light the head shikari drew apart and prayed earnestly, with much ostentation. A strange, unusual sight it was to Western eyes, to see this wild hillman praying thus to God amid his rugged hills.

Our Major, who was of the party, went out to reconnoitre, and returned breathless with excitement to say that the place was "simply crawling with chikor." Our shikaris told us that a very early start was necessary because, in the heat of the day, the birds got higher up the hills, where they could neither be found nor followed.

The means used for collecting chikor before a shoot sound rather cruel. In this arid country there are but few springs, all of which are known to bird and man, and for some days before our arrival coolies had been stationed at the springs as "stops," to keep the chikor from drinking, and thus collecting a considerable head of them at these watering places.

We started about five a.m., walking steadily up the valley, beating the faces of the foothills, and were kept very busily engaged. As we approached the precipitous mountain wall that shut in the head of the valley the shooting became more difficult, but fast and furious. The birds would not fly over that great mountain, but turned and swung back over the guns, many of them at a great height. Little "Sisi," the grey partridge, darted over us like bullets.

The "Sisi" is merely a small edition of

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the English partridge, and has all the latter's characteristics. The chikor, however, which is by far the most numerous, is a slightly smaller, greyer edition of the red-legged or French partridge. Its running powers are even greater, and on these bare hillsides it can be seen running ever higher and higher up as the gunner approaches, until at last it is forced to take to flight because it has reached the top of a hill, or has been obstructed by a mass of rock. In this cul-de-sac the birds were really cornered and had to "face the music."

The walking was so difficult—one had to hang on by eyebrows in some places—that the execution done was by no means in proportion to the ammunition expended. But whenever is it, in a truthful tale?

Our usual procedure was to shoot till the middle of the day, and then have tiffin in our tents, and a siesta as a sequel to the consumption of this and Japanese beer, the great drink on these expeditions. Towards evening we would sally out again, but were nearly always too weary to take the same keen zest as in the morning's proceedings. Our bag on the first day amounted to thirty-nine and a half brace, and for three full days we shot that valley, the bag naturally diminishing, but always showing good sport.

What one remembers most distinctly about chikor shooting is that just as one has pantingly breasted a steep rise, and looked down from the crest, a covey of brown birds, the exact colour of the red-brown rocks, glides swiftly downwards from your feet—a most difficult shot to get ahead of. The shikaris, if they can borrow your gun, or "bundook" as they call it, prefer to stalk round a hill until they have got several birds on the ground, in line, and then shoot three per cartridge. This alone is their idea of proper sport.



A CHIKOR SHOOTING PARTY; MURCHI KOTAL, BALUCHISTAN.



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I well remember the "bag" of birds slung under the apricot branches in camp, and simply festooned with hornets, which in some cases bit the chikor's head right off. Yet, a man may put his hand among these glistening, golden hordes and never be stung. The Indian hornet is said to be innocuous, but the Indian wild bee—*tout au contraire!*

Our return to the plain must have been picturesque. An onlooker would have seen a long thin procession winding down the mountain-side, like a migration of the patriarchs, with their flocks and herds, bearing their household gods, and a sprinkling of fierce-looking Pathans, to bear them company.

We undertook several expeditions for the pursuit of the wily chikor, but this was the longest and most successful.

One incident perhaps is worth recall, as illustrating the lack of humanity in these hillmen. On a morning which froze the marrow, a poor old man was provided by our head shikari to carry our tiffin. He was clad in a thin white shift and a sheepskin which left him bare to the breast, and as we halted he sat crouched low, and shivering in every limb. On remarking upon his condition to our shikari his only reply was, "It is of no consequence, he is sick and old and will soon die."

It has, no doubt, been said of many parts of the globe's surface, but it has certainly been said by the Baluchi, that, "God made Baluchistan last of all, when He was tired with the work of creation."

One of the rare oases in this barren land is Quetta itself, and its immediate surroundings. Owing to an elaborate system of irrigation the gardens and roadsides are quite verdant in spring and early summer. Although there is practically no rainfall in the country the necessary water for irrigation is collected in "caraises," or deep wells,

which are connected with one another by subterranean channels. The caraises draw the water mainly from the melting snow of the surrounding hills, which rise five thousand feet or more above the plateau on which Quetta is situated. They are made, and their communications tunnelled, by a peculiar tribe—the Brahui Pathans—who alone possess the secret of their successful manufacture. A deep well is sunk near the mountains and a tunnel driven from below water level for a space, when another shaft or well is opened to the outer air, and so on for perhaps three or four miles, till a native village is reached. The water here emerges from its subterranean channel to turn a mill wheel, and then to irrigate the fields. The keeping open of the passages furnishes constant work for the Brahuīs, who can occasionally be seen emerging like demons from the bowels of the earth. This method suffices for the villages, but the European gardens are supplied by piped water brought all the way from Zahr Gunn, the peak already mentioned.

There were, at the date of our sojourn, fine avenues of poplars, of from thirty to forty years' growth, by the side of the main roads leading into the town, and, in addition, a fair number of these useful shade trees in the bungalow gardens. But, one day, on leaving the "Mess" I was astounded to see a party of native "Sappers" engaged in cutting down all the poplars in the "Mess" garden. As I happened to be the "gardening member" of the Mess Committee, and had issued no such order, I asked the culprits what they were up to! They replied, in their fatalistic way, that "The Burra Sahib" had ordered it. And it was quite true! The Cantonments' Committee, presided over by our own Brigadier, had issued an edict that every poplar tree in Quetta was to be cut down! As two out of every three trees were poplars this Draconian



decree virtually meant the destruction of one of the station's chief assets. The Committee and the General in question knew as much about gardening and arboriculture as they did about the interior economy of the moon, but their *ipse dixit* sealed the fate of those poplars, and before we left hardly one survived to tell the tale.

They sinned also against the light, for I was informed by an old and authoritative resident that the whole origin and history of these trees had been laid before them, but that, in spite of it, they had persisted in their folly.

The facts, so my informant stated, were as follows. Thirty years before there existed, outside the "Residency," practically the only avenue of trees in Quetta. These are still extant, and consist of a magnificent double row of plane trees. They were attacked by the "Borer Beetle" to such an extent that it was feared they would be totally destroyed. There lived in Quetta in those good old days a C.R.E. of knowledge and intelligence. This man made a report in which he strongly advocated the planting of poplar trees, "for," said he, "if these be planted the 'Borer Beetle' will forsake his old love and betake himself to the new." What the wise man counselled was done, and the beetle left the plane trees and harboured in the poplars. In course of years a few of the latter had become rotten with the beetle's depredations, and in a few cases branches had fallen, and had caused an outcry that the trees were dangerous. Whereupon the aforesaid Committee had wrathfully issued their edict, and, although the wise man's report was thrown at their heads, they continued in their blindness. The result would seem to be a foregone conclusion. The beetle, deprived of his favourite habitat, will revert to his old love, and the last state of those plane trees will be worse than the first.

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There certainly is a fascination about the country due to its very bareness. There are, as I have said, practically no trees, nothing but broken rocks, but the rocks are tortured into strange shapes, and are of every conceivable shade of red, brown, grey, and white. I can quite understand the dictum of the older residents that "it grows upon you."

Our first Brigade training was carried out at the end of the hot weather in Gulistan, close to the Afghan border. During manœuvres we were made to do one march of nearly twenty miles in the fearful heat, with only a water-bottle full of tepid water. A few sucks at a pomegranate were all that could be got to supplement this, with the result that, after the "Cease Fire" had sounded, and a few miles from camp, our water carts were sent for to enable the men to get into camp again.

On another and similar occasion we lay under a wall at noon, in blinding heat—it had become too hot to continue any more fighting—when I unfortunately upset my Company Commander's whisky and soda. The last drink left! I was not popular; but the thought makes me feel thirsty even as I write.

We bivouacked that night in the open, some twelve miles from the Afghan border, after entrenching ourselves, and posting pickets. At dawn the cold was intense. I never remember it colder in any subsequent bivouac in Palestine or France. In these latitudes it is always cool at night and freezingly cold at dawn, while at midday the heat is unbearable. On parade in winter it is sometimes necessary to wear a fleece-lined British Warm, and, simultaneously, a topee to avoid sunstroke.

Such is Gulistan!

These manœuvres were possibly carried out to impress the border tribes with the conviction that

## BALUCHISTAN

there were still plenty of white troops in India despite the European War.

The Quetta Command consisted of two Brigades and, in addition, a Pioneer Battalion of Hazaras, an Indian Cavalry Battalion, two companies of native Sappers and miners, a full complement of Divisional Artillery, including several mountain batteries, and the usual Divisional details. The Karachi Brigade was under the same command, but, of course, never left that place as its *métier* was to garrison the important port, and supply a few troops to hold Hyderabad (Sind).

We formed, curiously enough, part of the Southern Army, but the reason for this is clear when the military system for concentrating troops on the Northern border is taken into consideration. The two points of concentration are Peshawar and Quetta, for the Northern and Southern Armies respectively. The Southern being brought by the sea route from Bombay to Karachi, and thence across Sind by the railway to Quetta.

At this date the Baluchis were quiet, as also were the tribes on the Afghan frontier. There was some trouble to the westward towards Nushki and Kelat, which called for the presence of a few troops; and a tribal feud between the Maris Pathans and a neighbouring tribe of Bagatis.

A year or two later the Maris actually occupied Sibi, at the foot of the Bholan Pass, where the "Agent" or Resident, who is the Political Governor of Baluchistan, has a house, and is accustomed to meet the surrounding tribes in conference. This rising called for a considerable expedition before it could be suppressed, but in our time the reactions of the Great War had not made themselves sufficiently felt to cause trouble. Rumours circulated in the bazaars of English defeats, but if they were believed the obvious readiness of our

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troops and the arrival of fresh battalions from overseas discounted such tales in the native mind.

The Pathans whom we met seemed invariably well-disposed, and physically magnificent; with fine aquiline features and an independent bearing. The Baluchis yielded in no wise to them in stature and physical characteristics, but were to be distinguished by their long ringlets reaching to the shoulder, and, on the whole, a milder cast of countenance.

The actual Afghan boundary was, as has been said, a few miles from Gulistan, at a place called Chaman, which was connected by railway with Quetta. There was nothing in particular to differentiate the realm of the Shah from our own side excepting a stone or two to mark the boundary, and nothing could be easier than to step across the forbidden border.

The annual training of British troops proceeded on time-honoured lines. From January to May we trained with our Companies. In June came battalion training in camp, followed in the autumn by Brigade manœuvres for about ten days, and somewhat farther afield. During these last we were put through what was called the "Kitchener Test," consisting of a march in full kit, followed by an attack on some position carried out under live ammunition fire; the whole to be performed within a stated period. On other days we marched out and blew up buildings to represent native villages, afterwards withdrawing, in approved fashion, whilst fighting a stiff rearguard action against a skeleton enemy, which was realistically represented by real Pathans in flowing white garments. We learned the uses of covering fire, and acquired some practice in picking up a good defensive position.

On the whole it may be said that for a battalion whose subsequent campaigning, by good fortune,

consisted almost entirely of the warfare of movement, this Indian training was of real value. Had it been our lot merely to hold mud-soaked trenches in Flanders it might well have been otherwise. Authority was probably wise in following traditional lines. It could teach us manœuvre, but no amount of book work could have supplied the actual, practical experience necessary for instruction in trench warfare.

## CHAPTER III

FROM QUETTA TO MHOW

*January, 1916—October, 1916*

“ It seems to float ever, for ever,  
Upon that many-winding river  
Between mountains, woods, abysses,  
A paradise of wildernesses! ”

—*Shelley.*

ON our return to Quetta news of a startling, and anything but welcome character, awaited me. The Adjutant informed me that likely men for Staff Officers had been called for, and that my name, among others, had, as I could not be consulted, been sent in. Moreover, I found that I had been the one selected, and was now to go through a course as understudy to the S.S.O. Quetta.

For the information of the uninitiated S.S.O. means the Station Staff Officer, though the word “ Station ” has no connotation of “ Railway.” It actually meant the Staff Officer who looks after the interests of the Station, *i.e.*, Quetta. He is usually a very hard worked man!

I found the S.S.O. a charming young regular, of the pre-war brand, and spent three enjoyable months with him: though the opening period was clouded by the loss of his little boy, submarined and drowned in the *Persia*, on the way out to join his father and mother in India. The days of suspense between the news of the loss of the boat

and the fatal news that the boy had gone down with his nurse, were very trying for the young father. In consequence the Divisional General told him to take a holiday, so within a few days of my appearance at the office, I became Acting S.S.O., and, somewhat to my gratification, telegrams addressed to the G.O.C., Quetta, were brought to my bungalow!

The G.O.C. was very pleasant, and I enjoyed my experience despite a solitary contretemps. On an occasion I had to inform various political and police officials that a party of wounded Indians were returning from Mesopotamia by a certain train, and that they should be met and given something of a welcome. It was felt that more notice must be taken of these dusky warriors, in order to encourage recruiting, create the atmosphere of victory, and mark our common brotherhood in arms. Though the "Agent" himself did not repair to the station, a high political officer, the Head of the Police, with myself to represent the military element, and various civic functionaries, all attended to meet the incoming train. Fortunately, perhaps, the G.O.C. was unavoidably absent. It was the hour of the siesta when all these great ones should have been asleep, but the sacrifice had to be made. The train came in, but no Indians! The only obvious course was, therefore, to fade silently and speedily away, though the fault was not mine, for I had to act on information received.

Not long after return to my Company an Orderly brought me a message, whilst marking in the Butts, bidding me repair to the Orderly Room and assume the duties of Adjutant of the battalion.

Now there were several other officers, and notably one of them, who could have far better filled this responsible post. I had, it is true, previously "acted" for a few weeks under our first C.O., but

the full "mantle," with all its heavy responsibilities, was another matter. Fortunately the new C.O. was a personal friend, so that I felt I should at a pinch have every help in my new job.

Soon after this a wire came from Simla inquiring whether Lieutenant Bacon would be willing to accept the post of "Territorial Section Officer" in the Adjutant-General's office at the base in Mesopotamia. Naturally various friends, including the C.O., had to be consulted, and, as an outcome of their advice, a reply was sent that "Lieutenant Bacon was *not* willing." I did not know what the duties of a Section Officer were, or why the wire came, and, more especially, why it was couched in such an unusual form; for it is not the usual way of the Army to ask whether a man is willing. However, I took advantage of their courtesy, and was properly hauled over the coals by the "Regular" element in Quetta for my refusal. A message, which fortunately never reached me, was sent by the S.S.O. to the effect that the G.S.O. of the Division had said, "Of course I should accept." But a man with a deep interest in his battalion wants to stay with it.

Some attempt must here be made to describe the town of Quetta itself, and its surroundings. To the south-west lies a high mountain called Chihiltarn, at the gate of the Pass through which the railway runs; on the east a high range of mountains, prominent among which is the snow-capped peak of Murdar, entirely shuts out the town from all access in that direction; whilst to the north another range runs from the edge of the plateau towards Bostan and the border country. To the north-west extends the sandy desert stretching away to Afghanistan, and in this direction the foothills are crowned with a series of strong points and gun emplacements, designed as a protection against a



## FROM QUETTA TO MHOW

Russian invasion in the days when Russia was our bugbear in the East.

The town is situate on the south-west corner of the plateau, and consists of European shops and a native bazaar, with three main roads leading out to cantonments, the Regimental Barracks with their attendant bungalows, and the residential quarter. Away to the north-east is the famous Staff College and the Hannah Pass. Quetta Fort, an old and obsolete structure, now used merely for ordnance stores, is close to the town itself.

At this time the Spring was upon us, and those who have not seen the peach and almond blossom burgeon and blow, with the great snow-hills of Murdar towering ten thousand feet in the background, can with difficulty realise their beauty, unless acquainted with a Northern Italian Spring.

The beautiful cabbage roses, growing rampantly in the hedges, are an early Summer feature here. But their blossoms are short lived, for they soon become covered with desert dust. I well remember a march out to the River Lora, when, at "Woodcock Copse" as it was called, and just before the unbroken desert begins, the men fell out amid a perfect welter of light pink rose-blossoms. I remember, too, how well the light khaki drill contrasted with the rose—a replica of the pink Hampshire rose, and badge of the regiment won at Minden.

There is one well-known preserve near Quetta of which some account must be given before passing on to more serious matters. Some twenty miles out to the north-east lies a jheel, known as Khushdil-Khan, where the duck collect in their migrations North and South. Any tank or stretch of water in this desert country is necessarily a resting place on these flights, and as there is none other for many

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miles around the birds, even when disturbed, must needs return again until the time comes for them to push on northward.

My first visit to Khush-dil-Khan was in company with a party of "Politicals," and we were driven out in a car by the Cantonment Magistrate's wife. On some foothills, about half a mile from the road, we caught sight of some large objects silhouetted against the sky. They looked like men, and stood as motionless as sentinels. On nearer approach we were able to identify them as a flight of great Griffon vultures, gorged with food, apparently incapable of movement, and gazing stupidly out over the desert.

These birds nest in the crevices of weather worn rocks, and are great carrion-feeders. So numerous are they in some parts that Lord Lilford has put it on record that gorges much inhabited by them are completely spoilt by the horrible stench of their unfinished meals. Their sight, flying power, and stamina are marvellous, but the individuals under notice were, as I have said, unable, for gastronomical reasons, to give us an exhibition of their powers.

On arrival at the jheel I found my modest tent erected in the courtyard of the Dâk Bungalow, the area of which was otherwise entirely blotted by a vast spread of canvas representing the tent of another member of the party, who, like myself, was not being accommodated in the Bungalow. A fine double-walled tent, in fact, that would have done credit to the Viceroy himself. The owner kindly offered to share this palace with me, but I was able to assure him that my own tent was much bigger than the one I was accustomed to use when in camp, and it is to be hoped that this information acted as a precept.

Upon the following morning we started our offensive on the duck. Our *modus operandi* con-



COOLIES WITH SOME OF THE BAG AT KHUSH-DIL-KHAN.

KHUSH-DIL-KHAN TANK, WITH MACHÂN FOR DUCK SHOOTING.



## FROM QUETTA TO MHOW

sisted in the four guns taking up positions in Machans or butts, made out of rushes, and sited in likely places, whilst coolies, in two boats, patrolled the jheel, disturbing the duck and attempting to drive them over the guns. But the heat on the water was intense, and, after a time, the coolies went to sleep in their boats, so needed a good deal of stirring up. But even despite long intervals of slack time there was a sufficiency of duck to keep one's attention occupied most of the day.

As far as I can remember our bag for the four days totalled about one hundred and forty duck, together with some twenty couple of snipe, shot by two of the party on the River Lora.

The jheel was about a mile long, and three-quarters of a mile wide, formed in a shallow depression of the desert, with no apparent reason for the existence of so much water, and only a sparse vegetation of rushes on its margin. The Dâk Bungalow, on a rocky eminence, commanded a good view of the "tank," but otherwise there were no steep banks or rocks to act as retaining walls, and the water simply faded into the desert.

There were here all the well-known species of duck, including mallard, gadwall, shoveler, sheld-duck, pintail, teal, wigeon, pochard and golden-eye. The mallard were particularly plump and fine, but there were none of the rarer species.

Only one flock of geese was in at the time of our visit, and I obtained a shot at them when marooned for a time on a small island, though without success. They probably appeared, in that clear atmosphere, to be at closer range than was actually the case. The apparent height from which my companions would pull down the duck was, however, a constant surprise. They were all good shots, well versed in this kind of sport, in which "knack," only to be acquired by experience, goes a long way.

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A second visit to Khush-dil-Khan, later on, with some other officers of the battalion, found not many duck in. Our bag on this occasion consisted of a goose, and about sixty duck, plus a wonderful number of snipe from the Lora. Starting with a walk of six miles from the Bungalow, under a burning sun, we reached the snipe marsh at about eleven a.m., and were glad to find so cool and green an oasis to rest our eyes.

The marsh was knee-deep in water, and full of snipe. I have never seen them in such quantity, though doubtless the Indian fowler, in the paddy fields, farther south, would think nothing of it. As we walked up the river-bed wisps of snipe rose and zigzagged off round the cliff-like walls the river had cut. One of the party, who had seldom shot before, was much puzzled by the shots, and the birds, at first, seemed to be aware of this. Later in the morning they changed their minds and gave us all the chances, including a bittern, which unwisely flapped up at my feet.

On reaching the last bit of likely ground we retraced our steps, and about two o'clock, wet and perspiring, were ready for an enormous tiffin and libations of Asahi beer. We then counted the bag, and found that we had shot some twenty-six couple, a good many being "Jack."

After tiffin the coolies strongly advised us to try downstream, which they assured us was *bôt âtcha* (very good) for snipe. We weakly yielded, though we felt we could not improve on the old ground. Greed, however, prevailed, and we started off downstream. Sorrow a snipe did we see for many miles, and the good ground was always about a mile farther on. Personally I was nearly foundered when we did at last shoot a few in some rushes, and then turned to tackle the four long miles back to our Dâk.

## FROM QUETTA TO MHOW

This, our second Summer in Quetta, dawned propitiously. Cricket had come to relieve the monotony of military routine, and I was well established in the tenure of my new job. But *Dis aliter visum*.

Another wire from Simla, "Lieutenant Bacon has been selected to attend the first Staff Course assembling at Mhow, on July 1st." Thereafter followed directions as to the taking of a tent, a horse, etc., but that, if required, a horse would be supplied locally.

So the Fates decreed that I was to leave all my friends for three months and fare forth, lonely for the first time since joining up, into the new world of Central India—and in the height of an Indian Summer. There was no escape this time, and off the victim went, with a carriage packed with ice to preserve life through the Sind desert.

At Mach Station on the southern side of the Bholan Pass I caught sight of the first punkah, actually at work, since landing in India. And I mention the fact to give some idea of the isolation, as also of the healthiness of the climate, of Quetta. The heat seemed very great, and I was encouraged as far as Sukkur by a fellow-passenger who told me that he was the doctor into whose house several Territorials had been taken to die, about a week before, when many of them had suffered from heat apoplexy in the troop-train from Karachi to Lahore. This was cheering, and I tried to get his opinion as to the best method for keeping one's compartment cool. But all questions and suggestions were met with a placid, "I don't know!"

Anyhow, Lahore was reached on the following morning without ill effects, and I immediately began to meet various officers coming from up country to assemble at Mhow for the Staff Course. I made friends with them, and, on arrival, we agreed to try

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and go to the Club for quarters. I found myself, however, one of three detailed to Mess with the Brecknocks, who had just lately come from Aden, and were stationed there. I had also to share a bungalow with an R.A.M.C. doctor, whose wife was expected out from home before long, but it appeared that until she came I was provided for. Such being my instructions at the station I set off, with very vague directions, to find his bungalow.

It was found at last (as I thought) and very nice it was; one of the best bungalows I had yet seen, and I felt I was in luck. A newly found friend, who had accompanied me, congratulated and left me. The doctor, so his khansama explained, was out at present, but if the Sahib would deposit his luggage, and wait, all would be well.

So I waited and waited, and as nothing happened a terrible suspicion began to grip me by the throat. Where was this doctor? Again I questioned the khansama, to make the further discovery that the Mem-Sahib was also not at home yet! But he would show me my room. That finished it. I knew that the Mem-Sahib was, or ought to be, still in England, and I determined to make my exit as unostentatiously and quickly as possible. Briefly stated I summoned my bearer to deal with my baggage—and incontinently hooked it.

About two fields away, and by the grace of Heaven, I found the right bungalow. It was untenanted, and apparently had been so for some time. There was no furniture, long grass waved up to the verandah, and the whole place wore a most dilapidated air. There were no signs of any Doctor Sahib, so I shaved and went for breakfast to the Brecknock "Mess."

Here, I may say, I had all the luck. Nothing could have been heartier than the welcome we got, and a mighty good Mess it was. About lunch-time



the "mythical" doctor turned up to explain that he himself was only coming in that day, had hired furniture, and advised me to do likewise. Naturally we rummaged about, as it is always wise to do in unoccupied houses in India, and luckily found several deadly little "kreits" under the roof.

My neighbour in the adjoining bungalow cheerily informed me, one day, that he had seen a large cobra leave his compound for mine, and suggested that it had taken up its quarters in my long grass. Well, if it did, it stayed there, for I never saw it, but cobras were undoubtedly about.

The ordinary residential bungalow at Mhow, with its compound and garden, though more picturesque than at Quetta, was of a rather ramshackle description. The red-tiled roofs lent a pleasant touch of colour, and the crude and variegated colours of the flowers could only be matched by those of the brilliant tropical butterflies.

It is a matter of life-long regret that so good an opportunity was never taken for the formation of a small collection. In five minutes specimens could have been obtained to beggar the wildest dreams of the English schoolboy "bug-hunter."

There was usually a fair-sized patch of rank grass near the bungalow which was of no great use, and lent an air of untidiness to the place, in addition to harbouring, on occasion, the snakes already mentioned. Cobras, kreits, and a species of large grass snake were, however, the only members of the serpent family which came to notice. The Gunners' Mess boasted a large "black" cobra, but whether this was a distinct variety or merely a colour freak this deponent knoweth not.

The town of Mhow itself lies close to the station, with first the native bazaar somewhat squalid in character, then the better class shops or West End,

## WANDERINGS OF A TEMPORARY WARRIOR

and finally, on the higher ground, the Fort, leading up to the good residential district of barracks and bungalows. It is two thousand feet above the sea and surrounded by what might perhaps be described as rolling downs, where that charming little antelope the "Chink" roams at will.

The beautiful mimosa trees and the bougainvillea covering the walls gave the true tropical finish to the gardens, and an atmosphere of rank lushness pervaded the place, very different from the hard dryness of Baluchistan.

A horse for our staff rides was my next need, though being but a beginner, and an old one at that, I hoped, by seeking out the Serjeant-Major of the Remount Depôt, to get a good quiet one. My mount, when he arrived, was a fairly quiet hack with good paces, but very green, for after riding him a few times he developed a sore back. I then got the loan of an excellent charger from a Gunner Battery, which thenceforward horsed me, free of all expenses, and solved that problem.

Our arrival in Mhow happened to tally with the three months of the "Rains"; a new experience for me. In Quetta it doesn't rain. Rain was not, however, allowed to interfere with our work, and we were in consequence kept hard at it writing reports, messages, orders; drawing maps; interrogating imaginary witnesses; making up tactical schemes; planning attacks and defences; siting guns and conducting skilful retreats; until we had certainly enlarged our military knowledge, and, moreover, discovered that the man mounting the hated red tab has to put in some work on occasion.

In the course of these three months we had pitched and struck camp in as many different places. The procedure was to leave our Headquarters at Mhow and ride out to some spot in the surrounding country, carefully selected previously by our in-

structors as possessing the necessary tactical features.

The night of arrival at the first of these was signalled by a perfect waterspout, and we all took refuge in a Dâk Bungalow round which the tents were pitched, and where we were to mess. Reports were brought by our faithful bearers, from time to time, as to the amount of water that had penetrated our respective tents. My tent being at the foot of a hill I feared the worst, but, on reaching it, discovered that the severity of the slope had saved it, and that the water had drained away upon either side. I was in luck, but not so some others of the Mess.

The next camp, among the thickly wooded hills to the west of Mhow, was formed to instruct us in mountain warfare. Each day we rode out, the horses knee deep in mud, and to make our job more difficult the sides of these hills are covered with the thickest scrub, through which, in places, the light of day can scarcely penetrate.

General Aylmer, lately from Mesopotamia, and then commanding at Mhow, came out one day, and certainly seemed to know all that was to be known about this peculiarly Indian form of warfare, which has now reached a highly technical pitch.

The General, a small, distinguished-looking man, with iron-grey hair, a pleasant expression, and of a very dapper appearance, rode up with his aide-de-camp and caught us somewhat unawares, in a wild part of the hills, as, split up into different "syndicates," each under an instructor, we scanned the landscape and prepared our "schemes."

The essence of hill scrapping is to effect, by a skilful combination of pickets and reliefs thrown out from the main body, an efficient protection against surprise to the whole force. A small section first gains an underlying feature of some high hill

## WANDERINGS OF A TEMPORARY WARRIOR

commanding the valley, and protects by its covering fire the advance to a higher crest of another section, and so on, until the top of the hill is cleared of the enemy and "made good." When this operation has been successfully carried out the main body is enabled to advance for a short distance, and so by gradual stages the advance continues until the stronghold of the hillmen is reached. This is usually blown sky high and its occupants dispersed, after which a gradual withdrawal is effected, usually accompanied by a similar screen of pickets, this time thrown out to the rear of the retreating column.

The old Indian Frontier warrior is probably worth six of the uninitiated in this kind of campaign.

The General criticised our respective dispositions for an attack on one of the surrounding hills, and turned my plan down with ignominy. He certainly seemed to be a good example of the old type, and one who knew his job thoroughly.

Our last camp was pitched by an old Hindu temple commanding a wonderful view of beautifully wooded country to the south of Mhow.

On the whole our instructors managed to cram a good deal into the three months. They had, however, their little weaknesses. The chief instructor had one for night operations, and one of those nights I shall never forget. We were to meet, after dark, at a certain bridge and march across country, on compass-bearings, to a certain rendezvous. It was raining so heavily that we met confidently expecting that we should be dismissed.

At the bridge the four instructors allocated themselves to different parties in order that they might be led to our destination. As I was the junior officer out of the thirty taking the course I felt quite

safe. I had never been strong on marching by compass, nor was Major G., who was associated with me for the purpose of the operation. When three of our four instructors had selected their guides I began to congratulate myself—but prematurely, for the voice of our chief instructor came through the murk, “Where’s Bacon?” I debated for a second or two as to whether it would not be wiser to fade away into the humid night, but finally determined that I must go through with it. “Here, sir.” “I think I will go with Bacon!” he decided.

We started off; Major G. with the compass, I with a white stick and the night marching Chart, and made across a barren waste to try and strike a certain ford across a nullah, where, alone, in the then swollen state of the river, it was possible to cross.

Major G. soon began to show signs of distress with the compass, and I gallantly offered to exchange rôles. It was an interminable time before we struck the river, and when we did no ford was apparent. So we roamed up and down, nearly breaking our necks over the rocks in the inky blackness, for, of course, we were not allowed to show a light. At last we made a bid for it, and got over, slightly higher up than the correct place. We then got our bearings again and went happily ahead, till G., to save time, swore he knew the way now without a compass. Naturally, in a few minutes, we had lost it, and in the middle of a cactus hedge! This contretemps, plus a very good bid for a watery grave in another swollen stream, landed us, almost the last party, at the rendezvous.

In the subsequent pow-wow our instructor nobly refrained from recounting how nearly we had succeeded in drowning him and breaking his neck, and contented himself with congratulating everyone

## WANDERINGS OF A TEMPORARY WARRIOR

on the amazing difficulties occasioned by the night, and upon our magnificent good fortune in having secured such a night for the purpose!

At the termination of this arduous course of "Potted Camberley" we were granted three weeks' "special leave." Instructions, however, arrived from Quetta directing me to proceed on a three weeks' "Adjutant's Physical Training Course" assembling at Poona. I was promptly told that I could snap my fingers at them if I liked, but naturally decided to go. Major S., one of our best instructors, and a very fine example of a Staff Officer, was highly amused at this decision, and informed me that I was now about to make the acquaintance of the most offensive class of man in the British Army. A man who developed his muscles at the expense of his brains.

## CHAPTER IV

SIND

*October, 1916—May, 1917*

“ Before my dreamy eye  
Stretches the desert with its shifting sand,  
Its unimpeded sky.”

—*Longfellow.*

I LEFT Mhow like a bride with a wreath of flowers round my neck, the parting gift of my mali (gardener), and, of course, to the delight of the Brecknock Mess. But a man could not help feeling pleased at the manner of their farewell, for it was all of a piece with their hospitality throughout my stay.

Poona is a delightful place, and particularly the “ Club of Central India,” but the whole period of my stay was clouded by a feeling of nausea engendered by the unusual “ physical jerks ” to which we were subjected. Many of the Adjutants, like myself, were “ stricken in years,” and found bayonet fighting, obstacle racing, and ladder climbing something stiff.

But the course was finished without any actual casualties being recorded, though the manner of my leaving was somewhat hasty. My bearer had thought fit to get some of my kit washed in a plague stricken part of the town, and deaths had actually occurred in this particular dhobi's house. The consequence being that a disobeyed order to burn

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those clothes, plus the early hour at which the train had to be caught, meant that nothing was packed in time, and that the whole proceeding degenerated into a dire scramble, fortunately without disastrous results.

Plague is more or less endemic in some parts of India, but at this date Poona was experiencing rather a severe bout and a considerable part of the town had to be placed out of bounds. All bearers had to be inoculated for it, on arrival, but white men were exempted from this regulation.

At Bombay I determined to go overland to Quetta, but, as a boat was then leaving for Karachi, I was ordered to proceed by sea. I congratulated myself in any case on getting back, and had not long arrived when I found that two of our Company Commanders, who shared my bungalow, had taken the trouble to tidy up my room for me, and, as thoughtfulness is not usually a distinguishing trait of the army man, I naturally felt such kindly good nature. They had even taken the trouble to lay out a pair of "red" tabs in a prominent place! I devoutly hoped, however, that these decorations might lie undisturbed for some time, and so give me a chance to take up my regimental duties as Adjutant again.

My return synchronised with the commencement of Autumn Divisional manœuvres, and one day we made an attempt at an attack, under cover of a barrage from some mountain-gun batteries, on the French model; but the C.R.A. was as nervous as a cat lest there should be any casualties. The manœuvre was, of course, a bit risky, for these old mountain battery nine-pounders are not meant for barrages, though eminently useful against the Pathan.

And so the happy days passed till, about a month later, a notification came from Simla that,



"Captain Bacon was appointed Staff Captain at Allahabad, and would proceed there to take up his appointment on etc."

Although dimly foreseen this was a terrible blow, for naturally one preferred to stay with one's battalion, especially on just getting back to it. The C.O. went to the Brigadier and made earnest representations for my retention, but the latter said he would not put it up to the G.O.C. the Division, as it would be useless. It was then that I became desperate, and asked the C.O. whether he would permit a personal and private appeal to the Divisional General himself. This he willingly agreed to.

I, therefore, wrote to the General, and he promised to look into it. Next day, to my delight, he sent me a short note saying that he had wired, personally, to Simla, asking that I might remain as Adjutant for a while, and that my appointment to Allahabad might be temporarily deferred. He added, however, that he had not much hope of success. But I am glad to say his kind endeavour was successful, and I shall ever be grateful to him. The period of his command expired before the result was known, and when I went to the station on his departure, I was more than surprised to find myself singled out by the great man from the galaxy of Staff Officers and notabilities who had come to assist, and to be told that, although the whole step was distinctly unusual, he had done it because the special circumstances of the case appeared to warrant it.

In the latter part of our stay at Quetta we were joined by the depôt of our battalion in Mesopotamia, and, having now a strength of one thousand five hundred men in barracks, we were considerably crowded. We sent, in all, about six hundred men and seventeen officers on draft to that battalion, and

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were constantly filled up again by fresh drafts from home; convalescents being sent up to the depôt as they got fit, and returned with fresh drafts to the Gulf.

In March of 1917 the C.O., our Brigade-Major (who had been with me at Mhow), and I, made a resolve to go for a ten days' duck shooting expedition in Sind, and, lest my reader might think that our united absence would leave a big gap, it may be said that, from the military point of view, this was the slack season, when individual training in the Companies was the order of the day. The Chief of Police in Quetta, who knew more of the shooting in this part of India than any other living man, told us that there was a well-known shoot near Hyderabad. It appeared, from his account, to be somewhat inaccessible, but much to be recommended, and that if we wrote to the Collector of the district he would probably give permission. We accordingly did so, and got it, so made all preparations for a start.

On the eve of departure, however, the Collector wrote saying that the Commissioner for Sind proposed coming to shoot there during the following week, and that we might go, but would probably get nothing. The natives would see to that when a Commissioner was round and about! He was, however, a sporting soul and offered us another jheel named Sakrand, which he recommended. But we were so chagrined that we were in a mood to say, "No second best for us."

That evening at the Club we told our policeman of this piece of ill luck, and his advice was, "Go. The Collector is a good chap. I know him. If he says Sakrand is satisfactory it will be." And we went.

Our bearers, of course, lost themselves at Sukkur Junction, the consequence being that we arrived at our station with one bearer between the

three of us. The headman of the village, and the stationmaster, were at the station to meet us, gave us a small repast, and provided three camels to take us on our way. The headman promised to see our bearers on arrival, and send them on with a flea in each ear.

At dusk, after a twelve mile ride, which nearly shook us to bits, but which must be a fine remedy for liver complaint, we reached our Dâk Bungalow by the borders of a big jheel, and, to our surprise, with the Collector himself in temporary residence! We naturally introduced ourselves, and were then told, "Now you are all to come across to my quarters for dinner, it's just ready." And never were three hungry men more grateful than we, particularly as we had but the one bearer to unpack and cook, and it was getting late. We found that Collector to be "one of the best," for, not only were we royally fed, but he announced his intention of shooting with us, and that all arrangements had been made for coolies and beaters.

At breakfast on the following morning the Collector announced that he had arranged a two days' shoot at Sakrand, which he said would enable us to shoot the best of it, and that, then, we were to proceed to our original hope, the good jheel, and finish our week there, taking a smaller one on the way. It appeared that the Commissioner was not coming after all, and that this kindly host of ours had planned it all out to give us the very cream of his district!

We accordingly started off that same morning, each man in a punt-like boat, with a coolie apiece to manipulate it, another to pick up, and a good supply of ammunition.

The Sakrand jheel is a lovely piece of water, full of little islands covered with a tender growth of green willow-like bushes, and fringed with reeds; the

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waterways between the islands being, as it were, "rides" in a pheasant covert: with a delightful sun over all, and not too hot at this season of the year. The whole atmosphere of the place seemed reminiscent of a punt on the Cherwell, and on the best day of summer.

The procedure was as follows. Our boats would be drawn up behind a screen of bushes, and the coolies sent round behind to drive duck over our heads. The whole business was not unlike an aquatic pheasant-shoot, with duck substituted for pheasant.

Just before tiffin we were treated to a very fine drive. I had never had the luck to shoot so many duck at a stand before. Guns soon became very hot in such a climate, and one was very glad of hand-guards, and, in addition, a handkerchief for the left (barrel) hand. We lunched by a creaking water-wheel—the sound breaking pleasantly on the hot, drowsy afternoon—and then continued our sport.

Duck here were of all sorts, with teal predominating. These last gave some fine snapshots, coming over the water "rides" at a considerable height, and I am glad to remember making fairly good practice with them. The coolies, of course Sindese, are very good water retrievers, and enjoy the job thoroughly. There seemed a good deal of the aboriginal about them, and they wore less clothes than any other natives I ran against in India.

Sakrand is certainly my most delightful Indian memory. Two perfect days of sport under the pleasantest possible conditions!

From here we took camel across country to a small jheel of a different character, named Sutiaro. This proved to be merely flooded land, with forest trees and small thickets rising out of it. Such forms of jheel may be best described by the legal phrase, "All that land covered by water." This one was,

I think, only a temporary submergence due to irrigation work. Anyhow, there was here far less depth of water, and far more vegetation; the latter, of course, affording excellent cover for duck. We found a fair sprinkling of snipe, but they were very difficult of approach, and a good many duck, but they too, as a rule, flew unkindly. The natives were, if possible, a thought more primitive and aboriginal than at Sakrand, but all possessed honest, jolly, and rather handsome faces.

As I glided round a corner into a space of clear water, surrounded on three sides with bush and trees, and where I imagined myself "the first that ever burst into that silent sea," there swam slowly and majestically upon the flood a fine old pelican, and without hurry or flurry, thinking, and expecting, no harm. My aborigines gesticulated with much excitement, and shouted, "Maro Sahib! Maro Sahib!" But I thought differently. Why disturb this fine old bird in his native solitudes. But abstinence proved futile. A swarthy Sindee produced, from somewhere in the boat, a bow and arrow of the most primitive character—the arrow possessing a dangerous-looking iron point—and took to the water in hot pursuit. The pelican paddled majestically away through the tree trunks, and pursuer and pursued had, very soon, vanished from sight.

I had at least a comfortable feeling that no harm could come to the bird. The man, I thought, could only get along slowly in the knee-deep water. But the sequel proved an entire misjudgment of the situation. Before long the hunter returned carrying his prey triumphantly, and deposited it in the boat. He had struck it under the wing with the arrow, but how he managed to get on terms it is impossible to say.

That afternoon, we rode for another eighteen

miles across the Sind desert to a Dâk at Shahpur, leaving our Sakrand party behind. It was dusk long before we arrived, and we could only trust to the camel drivers for direction, despite the fact that even they seemed in doubt about it. This is a wild and desolate country; nothing but sand and low growing scrub—a kind of butcher's broom. We were, therefore, glad to spot, at last, a faint light on the desert; the first signs of human habitation since we had left the jheel. There we found the Zamindar, or farmer, on whose land the "good" jheel was situate. He settled us in our new quarters, and arranged a time for the morrow's shoot.

We eventually found that it meant a ride of some two miles to the jheel, but there was our Zamindar waiting with the coolies. The party at once pushed off in boats, down a small "cut," much overgrown with weed, and took up its stand behind a half-submerged hedge. Soon after the coolies left to make their circuit for the first beat a flock of wild geese came over, apparently well within shot. But despite the expenditure of a lot of ammunition only one came to ground, a splendid specimen and as fat as butter. Then came a thunderous sound, the like of which I have never heard from game before or since. It was caused by the disturbance of the duck on their feeding grounds, and, soon after, they began to come over; not single scouts, but in battalions.

We had in consequence a very good pick up at that first stand, and in spite of only moderate shooting. The majority were mallard, but the remainder of many different species. During the first hour on that jheel we saw more aquatic bird-life than one would be able to see in a month in England. Every kind of crane, stork, heron, duck, dabchick, and submersible waterfowl, with three distinct kinds of kingfisher and dazzling hoopoes. It was certainly nature at its wildest.

At the next stand we had some difficulty in floating our flat-bottomed boats, for here the land disputed sway with the water. After a few duck had come over there arose an outcry from the beaters, and no wonder, for slipping between the trees, and heading directly for the line of guns, I caught sight of a wild pig making for either my boat or the Brigade-Major's. At the moment I was only loaded with number six shot, and had not the faintest idea as to whether it would do any more than merely tickle up, and infuriate, the brute.

On he came, and when within about twenty yards of us saw his danger, put down his head, and charged like a thunderbolt at the bush behind which crouched the Brigade-Major. The latter fired twice in very rapid succession. The second shot came just as the pig made contact with his boat. But it served to turn him, and he dashed back into the bush to roll over dead.

That number six charge, at close quarters, had gone in behind the shoulder like a bullet. If it had not done so that staunch attack would have upset the boat with all its occupants, and someone would, probably, have come off very badly.

There then arose a great shout of triumph from the coolies, who interrupted the "drive" to throng from every quarter and view the dead pig.

After the pig's demise we had no further incident of an unusual character, but, what was much better, excellent sport.

Upon each evening of our stay we had a "Sun-downer" with the Zamindar in his tent, and listened to some music-hall extracts on his gramophone; this before mounting our camels for the ride home.

One day we secured some black partridge, and a quail, whilst after snipe, but found that every step we took in the bog threatened to be our last;

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and, apart from this drawback, the exertion of extracting feet from adhesive mud, in great heat, is tremendous. So the duck being the *pièce de résistance* we returned to them.

During the three days of our stay upon the last ground we bagged one hundred and ninety-seven duck, and this though one day had practically been given up to snipe, and the shooting had only been moderate. We were, however, told that if the jheel had not been disturbed about a week before the bag would have been doubled.

The Sindese impressed one as being a frank, jolly race. The Zamindars make a lot of money out of their farms, but are such heavy gamblers that they lose it all again, and have perforce to mortgage their farms to the native money-lenders. With reasonable care the Zamindars could become very wealthy. It is obvious, however, that it is the money-lending class who wield the power in India, and have both Zamindars and Ryots under their thumb. The superficial observer might certainly be inclined to think that the chokra (or boy) runs India from the point of view of work, and that the money-lender runs it on the financial side.

We were sorry when our week was up, and left vowing by all means in our power to return next year to the friendly Collector, and genial natives of Sind.

The bag for our six days' shoot totalled three hundred and thirty-nine head, and made up as follows:

	Duck.	Quail.	Snipe.	Black partridge.	Pelican.	Goose.	Pig.
Sakrand, Feb. 6th	46	—	—	—	—	—	—
" " 7th	60	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sutiaro, " 8th	21	—	1	—	1	—	—
Shahpur, " 9th	128	—	—	—	—	1	1
" " 10th	17	1	6	2	—	—	—
" " 11th	52	—	—	—	—	2	—

On the way back to Quetta the C.O.'s bearer



again left himself behind at Sukkur, and the Brigade-Major's followed suit at Mach, the consequence being that we arrived once more with one only. They are a feckless race who get out of a train, moon about, and are then surprised to find that it has gone. But Quetta bearers are notoriously bad.

I have very vivid remembrances of my last bearer, a fawning dirty-looking scoundrel, who became so much the worse for drink on the occasion of the Feast of "Holi" that he was quite incapacitated from service, and lay groaning upon his bed in my compound. In consequence he was sent for, and turned up hardly able to stand. Verdict, "sacked." After a discreet interval the grave and respectable bearers of two brother officers came in solemn deputation to wait upon me, and to intercede for the culprit. "Him very seek," they told me. I knew they were lying, but being unwilling to hunt up a fresh scoundrel I made great parade of clemency and—Verdict, "reinstated!"

On the shooting party's return to Quetta rumour began to circulate that we were next for active service, and before long received an official instruction to that effect; but when, or where, was not divulged.

Before quitting the subject of Quetta and its surroundings it may be of interest to naturalists to mention that there are a large number of birds common both to the Quetta district and to the British Isles.

On visiting the town museum, soon after arrival, we found a collection of British birds' eggs, and, on inquiring the reason, discovered that, on the contrary, they were Baluchi birds' eggs! On further acquaintance with the district many species common to both countries were identified. Among warblers the chiff-chaff and willow-wren were

represented. The common redbreast was joined by the far rarer blue-throat. Ravens were common on our bungalow chimneys, and brilliant hoopoes lit up the dusty compounds. Swallows, thrushes, bramblings, and, I think, buntings, woodcock, merlin, and bitterns may be added to the roll. The beautiful golden auriol nested at the Staff College. A flock of Cornish choughs was seen on the battalion parade ground, and these with shrikes and, that *rará avis* (in England), the roller, complete the list.

In addition there were several birds "the same with a difference," such as the *sisi*, equivalent to the English grey partridge, the *chikor* to the "Frenchman," and the "Quetta" finch to the bull-finch.

The explanation may be that these birds were on summer migration from Africa to Siberia, and Baluchistan the first climate with anything like temperate characteristics on their route.

Of indigenous species the brilliant little bee-eater, or sun-bird, was often seen perching on the telegraph wires, and, together with the flamingo, was one of the few more remarkable representatives of tropical bird life.

Mention must be made of that useful scavenger the kite hawk, common throughout India, if only to narrate a typical "traveller's tale" of an experience which has, however, occurred to better men, and may, therefore, meet with credit.

On the golf links one afternoon my approach shot lay beautifully upon the green at the ninth hole, and my opponent, a Scotsman, was quite out of the picture, when a kite hawk swooped suddenly from the blue and carried off my ball. The Scotsman promptly claimed the hole, relying on that unjust maxim, "Lost ball lost hole."

The same point of similarity occurs with trees,

flowers and butterflies. There are hardly any of our common "annuals" which will not flourish in a Quetta garden. Apples grow quite well, though not quite with English flavour; but, on the other hand, peaches and apricots grow well and ripen to perfection in the open air. Amongst other familiar butterflies the "Clouded Yellow" of the English clover field was much in evidence.

Orders now began to rain in upon us in quick succession in this Spring of 1917, and the climax of our career as a battalion was to be developed in rapid and startling fashion. Orders first came for the depôt to leave for Poona. Then came orders to hand in arms preparatory to going overseas, followed by countless requests for returns of strength, weight of baggage, etc.

Following these came orders to get our arms out of the Fort again. But these last we were ordered, privately, to ignore, as it would only have meant returning them again. Then came orders for a draft of five officers to be sent to Mesopotamia, followed rapidly by orders to send a draft of two hundred men to another Hampshire battalion off on active service. Finally, orders for the battalion, thus weakened in every department, to entrain for Karachi, relieve the Norfolks then garrisoning that port, and there to await further orders to proceed overseas.

It seemed an extraordinary procedure, in the light of after events, to weaken a battalion just on the eve of proceeding on active service, and it certainly proved a serious and lasting handicap to us during the campaign that followed. The principle of splitting up battalions as much as possible after training together, and the placing of men under new officers, would almost seem to have been the guiding star of the War Office. Such action had the effect of rendering *esprit de corps*

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very difficult to encourage, and it certainly strained patriotism to an unnecessary extent.

At last we got definite orders to entrain for Karachi, and great were the preparations for troop-training across the Sind desert in the intense heat. The military authorities were as jumpy as they could be at that time lest some heads might roll in the sawdust. The outcry following upon the deaths of Territorials on some of the trains had evidently funkcd them. We were compelled to take such a supply of mineral water that even our batch of all-absorbing Tommies were unable to drink it, and ice enough to freeze a polar bear.

The send-off from Quetta was kindly and touching, nearly the whole Station turning out to say good-bye, and the bands of most of the garrison units playing us away. Quetta had, it seemed, got to like its Territorials, and the general opinion as to their military capacity was flattering compared with that on their arrival in January, 1915.

At Karachi we were split up, on detachment, one Company going to Hyderabad (Sind), one to the Island of Minaura, at the mouth of the harbour, one and a half remained in barracks at Karachi, and details occupied the harbour.

In the Guard Room I found a prisoner awaiting court martial. He had languished in the Regimental Guard Room for many months, and had apparently been altogether mislaid. On representing his sad case to the Staff I was told to mind my own business, and for aught I know he is there still.

Hardly had we had time to visit all our detachments when orders arrived to embark on H.M.T. *Chenab*. A very clear memory stands out of that evening down by the seashore, just before we sailed, for there was now a definite feeling that our exile had ended. That sea was to carry us westward, for all we then knew back to England,

after two and a half years of absence in a land of drought and hard work.

Our scattered detachments collected and embarked we turned our noses in the direction of home, and, though to an unknown destination, the feeling was one of ease as a sequel to the past strenuous weeks of work, which, as may be imagined, had fallen heavily on the Adjutant. We had left our non-effectives behind in India, and our strength now showed at about six hundred, with twenty-two officers.

We put into Aden and so saw a desultory exchange of gun fire going on between the small isolated Turkish Army, cut off by natural features from reinforcements, and our own small force, for which none could be spared. It was said, but with how much truth I do not know, that on Fridays the opposing forces had a mutual holiday, by arrangement. In any case the position was, at that date, I believe, one of stalemate. How operations were eventually concluded the rate-payer has now probably forgotten. It may be that the distant interchange of compliments is still going on!

The next morning we entered the Red Sea, and so left behind us Indian administration for good. The general impressions obtained of the latter by a much chivied Territorial may, perhaps, not be out of place here.

"Paget, M.P.," had a few weeks, we two and a half years, in which to study the Indian Empire. Probably our conclusions were as wide of the mark as his! But one gets the impression that our rule has justified itself. Probably no other nation could have kept that great, populous collection of nations and creeds together, and have so increased their material prosperity. Undoubtedly it is a good training-ground, and a good country for white men with little cash to live in. The Anglo-Indian is, at

any rate, a happier and bigger man in a better position than he would ever be at home. There is inherent in the circumstances of our position a greater solidarity and friendship among white men. They must look after one another. It is far easier for the man or woman who is somewhat of an "outsider" to get into "Society." There is much less "caste," cliquiness and starch to go round, though this probably applies to Army and Civil officials only, and not in respect of the second class official and good, white commercial element. Better chances of sport, and games of all kinds, exist, without too heavy a payment for them. There is a certain amount of Eastern glamour, but with it an undoubted squalor. The natives are not really dependable. They have their good qualities, but truth and honour are not among them, at least as understood by the educated European.

There was, too, during the whole period of one's residence, a feeling that one was not floating in the main current of thought and ideals. Perhaps the best illustration of this feeling during the war was the apparent callousness of English women in India to the sufferings and hardships of the great struggle which was shaking Europe to its foundations. They danced, played tennis and golf, flirted, and generally carried on with their usual peace time existence. They did not really interest themselves in war work, as was, presumably, done at home. When their husbands went to Mesopotamia, or elsewhere, they still managed to be fairly gay. Yet they were of the same class as those who left their sheltered homes and drove lorries, nursed, or took part in a thousand and one war activities.

In respect of this "Mem-Sahib" attitude towards vital, current affairs of the Empire I think we must go for an explanation to that oft quoted line, "Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay."

## CHAPTER V

THROUGH EGYPT AND SINAI

*May, 1917—October, 1917*

“ Where are now the freighted barks  
From the marts of East and West?  
Where the knights in iron sarks  
Journeying to the Holy Land,  
Glove of steel upon the hand,  
Cross of Crimson on the breast? ”

—*Longfellow.*

WE were surprised to find the Red Sea so astonishingly cold. The trooping season was over, and the period normally considered a very hot one. At any rate a “British Warm” was quite comfortable on deck.

The famous *Emden* was still supposed to be at large in these waters, and we, in consequence, had an occasional “alarm” to see that everyone knew his station. As ship’s Adjutant I was one of the three men on board (the other two being the C.O. and the Captain) who knew when an “alarm” was coming off, so could repair to the bridge to watch events before the siren sounded. When one came, the men poured up from below in excellent order, putting on lifebelts as they came, nor was there a vestige of panic. One, however, felt a certain satisfaction that it was but a rehearsal. When all were reported on deck the before-mentioned three went below to see that all was clear, and, on one occasion, found a man in a frantic condition still

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looking for his lifebelt. Had we really been torpedoed there is small question that, by the time we found this solitary searcher, he would have been beneath the sad, salt waves. He was ordered up on deck without the belt, and he fled for it.

We were seated at dinner one night when just about to pass the well-known rocks standing midway through the Red Sea, when one of our Company Commanders thought fit to chaff the Captain with the remark, "Well, skipper, I suppose you are going to throw us away on the rocks to-night." The Captain glowered at him in silence, and when he, later on, joined the C.O. and myself in our cabin he expressed his heartfelt displeasure at such a remark. "It is enough to make it happen," he said, and added that the crew were much put out by the fact that some of our men had been singing hymns. He added that the crew thought it a most ill-omened proceeding.

All of which tends to show the importance of looking at, and making allowance for, things from the sailor's point of view. For what a landsman may think superstitious may be a very real sentiment in the minds of those who go down to the sea in ships and occupy themselves with fairly tough business in the great waters.

I had almost forgotten to mention that we possessed a "fishing" officer, one from out of Canada—the land, apparently, from which the tall fishing stories come—and that he had engaged to catch a shark whilst at Aden, though his well-meaning efforts, to our relief, were not crowned with success. To listen to him one might imagine that shelling peas was a difficult manœuvre by comparison, but fortunately we had already had some small previous experience of his various enterprises.

One morning early, the sad intelligence was brought to the Orderly Room that one of our



subalterns had rolled overboard during the night. As the accommodation for officers was practically non-existent most of them were in the habit of sleeping on deck. There were also places where no rail existed to prevent them carrying out such a laudable attempt. The alarm occurred owing to the fact that, on awaking, his companions found his bed untenanted.

I did not, at once, inform the Captain or the C.O., as it was obvious that, if he had rolled over, what was once a plump subaltern would be many miles away. About an hour later the young gentleman was discovered, sleeping seraphically in the Second Mate's cabin, whither he had dived for refuge when a squall struck him.

We had by this time been informed that we were making for Suez, but whether to disembark there or proceed to England we did not know. On arrival, however, we received orders to entrain for Cairo that night, and then first discovered our probable, and ultimate destination.

It was just at this time that two unsuccessful attempts had been made to take the Turkish stronghold of Gaza, and force a passage into the Holy Land. As a matter of fact we had, in the first and second battles of Gaza, lost about twelve thousand men, and had been driven out after actually getting into Gaza. The force had now taken up a line, in trenches, close to the steep escarpment to the immediate south of Ali-el-Munktar. Reinforcements were therefore badly needed on this front, and General Allenby was on his way out to take command.

Before we left the *Chenab* skipper took the C.O. and myself into his cabin, and expressed his great satisfaction over the voyage. He added that when he had talked things over with us after embarkation he had formed the opinion that all

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would be well. He had, it appears, come up against some rather starched, military characters, who had raised his gorge. But, as he said, he found that we were anxious to be friendly, and he had registered a determination to do all he could for us on the voyage. He certainly carried out his resolution, and, in the confined quarters of a converted trooper, his goodwill made what might have been a very uncomfortable trip a reasonably good one. All the ship's officers lined our train, and gave us a rousing send-off. So we started for Cairo under happy auspices.

We arrived at Zeitoun in the early hours of the morning, and immediately went under canvas on the fringe of the desert. We also discovered that a new Brigade was forming, to be part of the new 75th Division earmarked for Palestine.

A day or so after our arrival a heavy dust storm, the "khamsin," began to blow, and it was with difficulty that any tent could be kept up. The heat and dust were intense, and both almost unbearable. Accustomed though we were to desert conditions generally, this experience was unprecedented. The whole of the tents pitched for another battalion, but as yet untenanted, were laid level with the ground. Upon the following day a Staff Officer came out from Cairo to inspect, and, although I made a heartfelt attempt to ride him off this scene of desolation, he spotted it. "Hullo! Good Gad! What's happened here!" The inevitable followed—a fatigue party from the battalion to pitch the tents again.

I rode over the site of our Zeitoun camp some months later and wondered how we had managed to exist there for a fortnight. An occasional run into Cairo had been possible, and Heliopolis was next door. But the deep blue, Egyptian sky, and dry atmosphere, were very pleasant, and so is the



CONSTRUCTING SAND-RAG TRENCHES AT EL-ARISH (SINAI).



## THROUGH EGYPT AND SINAI

remembrance of one or two good route-marches. We, of course, visited the Pyramids, and were frankly disappointed. The Sphinx, too, was very much smaller than one had been led to expect. Perhaps the best view of the Pyramids is a distant one through blue haze; they at least then give some impression of mystery to my prosaic mind.

At Zeitoun we were again fitted out with rifles, and shed many of our instruments of "musique." We had possessed a useful "band" from the date of the battalion's formation, but, although the Brigadier was very anxious that it should take enough instruments to make a "cheerful noise," any frills or duplicates had to go. In other respects our Indian equipment was quite suitable for the coming campaign, and the climatic conditions proved to be remarkably similar.

We also received numerous visits from Staff Officers, who cantered up and asked if they could do anything for us, in the pleasantest manner possible. But about the only request we did actually make produced no result whatever. As a fact there was, in our experience, a good deal too much of this cheery *laissez faire* among the Staff. Too much casual, *pro forma* offering of service, without any real desire or capacity for help attached.

After about three weeks of this camp we were ordered to El-Arish, one stage up the line, with one other battalion of the new Brigade in company.

El-Arish was then exclusively made up of sand hills of a forbidding character as a border to the sea. It was really heavy exercise to walk up to the camp after bathing in that climate, and the walk almost invariably undid the exhilaration produced by the bathe. We tried a little shooting on an extemporised range, to get broken-in to our strange rifles, and had some practice in making sandbag trenches;

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but the surrounding country practically precluded manœuvres of any sort.

Our next stage up the line was to Rafa, where a spirited engagement had taken place in the early days of the advance of "East Force" as it was called, resulting in a considerable Turkish defeat. It was only ten miles from Railhead at Deir-el-Belah, about fourteen miles from the Turkish position at Gaza, close to the coast, possessed a fair water supply, and was the junction from which a branch line had been laid in the direction of Beersheba. This line was operated as far as Shellal, being subsequently extended to Karm Station, about twenty miles from Beersheba.

It must be understood that places like Rafa, El-Arish and Belah were of no size or political importance, being in the first place only watering places with good wells, which are few and far between in the Sinai desert.

Just as we received orders to move to Rafa, where we should, for the first time, be within hail of hostilities, the genial Z., previously referred to, obtained a fortnight's special leave to England. We left him by railside as we moved off, and if shame ever entered his cosmos it should have then! As a fact we never saw him again. The War Office claimed him for its own, and he was eventually promoted, and mentioned in despatches, for valuable services on the home front. "*Sic itur ad astra.*"

We camped at Rafa on some rising ground about four miles from the sea, and there, for six or eight weeks, trained steadily, putting in some useful work despite the excessive heat. We had also to supply guards for all sorts of outposts all round the district, and, when guard was mounted in the evening, on the word, "By the right, to your duties, quick march," small parties tailed off and

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away to all points of the compass like spokes from the hub of a wheel. We also put in some good practice in various forms of attack, for which the country was quite suitable, and some very trying marches over the sand, which, in the heat of the Sinai desert, inevitably caused a good deal of falling out. The Brigade was also finally made up, the other two battalions being Somersets and Gurkhas respectively.

Occasionally we marched down to the sea to bathe, in company with camels and various "details," and one day a Yeomanry officer accosted me with the question, "You know, I suppose, that your men are much too far out? There were three men drowned here the last time I came, and they weren't as far out as that. The tides are very strong!" There ensued a great calling in of adventurous spirits, fortunately without loss.

A good little pony I had selected at Cairo, while being ridden to water by its groom cut its leg in a telephone cable, and, though the wound was stitched, she had to be "cast" and sent down country. For the next few weeks I rode a charming little mare with unusually good paces, but was roused, one early morning, by hard galloping, followed by silence. On getting up I was surprised by the arrival of my groom, who asked, in rather an injured manner, what horse I was going to ride on parade that morning. "Why, my own horse," I answered. "Well," said he, "that's impossible because she was suddenly scared in the horse lines this morning, broke her heel rope, galloped through the lines of the officers' tents, and, tripping over some guy ropes, broke her neck," and he proceeded to show me the poor little animal lying dead three tents away from my own.

Another incident I remember with pleasure was concerned with our excellent Sergeant-Major. We

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had, as a battalion, incurred the wrath of our Brigadier because certain men, who had been out all night on guard in the desert, had had neither the time, nor means, to shave before a suddenly ordered inspection by the Divisional General. As a punishment an extra battalion inspection by the Brigadier was ordered. This was peculiarly irksome to men who were tired out with a heavy week's training. The Colonel was upset, and did not relax any of the work for the previous afternoon, which meant that there would be no time for smartening up equipment for the General's inspection on the morrow.

The Sergeant-Major sought me out, and suggested that if an afternoon off could be given the men would spend the time in spit and polish, and the concession would be more than repaid by earning the goodwill of the Brigadier. I heartily agreed with the proposal, and told the diplomatic Sergeant-Major to come along with me, at once, and we would together urge his proposal to the Colonel. The Colonel agreed, and the result was excellent. The men turned out so well next day that the General's wrath was amply appeased and turned into encomiums. It was just an instance of tact, showing the value of a first-rate N.C.O., who thought for himself, and also the advantage of appealing to the honour of the men, rather than relying on the exploded methods of the martinet.

At last we got orders to march, as a Brigade, to Deir-el-Belah, well within the borders of Palestine, and about four miles from Gaza. The Staff cancelled our original marching orders, and then, finally, ordered us to pass the starting point at about ten a.m. In that hot sun the heavily equipped men were put to a test which was too hard, and, it would seem, absolutely without necessity.

Before we reached the Brigade starting point





BATTALION IN BIVOUAC AT BELAH, BEFORE THE CAPTURE OF GAZA.



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our fine old Sergeant-Major—my right hand man—was sweating intolerably, and, as the march proceeded, men fell out right and left, tumbling over like shot rabbits under the terrible sun, and the fearfully bad going among the sandhills. A halt had perforce to be made.

Half-way through the march I had to ride on and locate the place appointed that night for the bivouac. When at last I had found this I rode back, and saw what appeared to be the approaching head of the Brigade column. It actually turned out to be the remains of the battalion—about a platoon strong—raving with thirst, spent and dropping. The other two battalions being in no better plight.

There then ensued a terrible clamour from the parched troops for water, the supply of which, in this desert, was miserably scanty. The Company Commanders were themselves too done up to instil any order into their men, and, being a little fresher, it devolved upon me to see to this, and a terrible task it was.

It is good to record that the men, even in those sore straits, responded nobly to orders. The Brigade Commander made matters no better by calling together a conference of beaten C.O.'s and Adjutants, and slanging us for the occurrences of the march, although these were palpably, and in no sense, our fault, but entirely due to the very faulty arrangements of his own staff. That night stragglers came in at every hour, and, wonderful as it may seem, we marched at nine a.m. on the following day with every man in his place.

We had now but a few miles to cover, but these, while they lasted, were almost as trying as those of the previous day. At last, spent and sore, we reached our bivouac, within two hundred yards or so of the sea-coast, and some three or four miles from Gaza.

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I was, I think, at this date the only officer who had had no leave, and as I had been by far the busiest since leaving India, and months before that, I was naturally looking forward to a short course at the School of Instruction, Zeitoun. Before actually starting for this, however, information came that I was to be attached to the Staff of our Division, and to give up the Adjutancy.

"What must be, must," in the words of Corporal Pym, but my personal wishes would have naturally inclined towards remaining with the regiment.

We first came under fire about a day after our arrival in this bivouac, one of our bathing parties receiving the compliment of a Turkish shell or two on its way down to the sea. Our bivouac here, among some palm trees by the sea, was typically Palestinian, and one of the best we had yet found. But I had to leave a day or two later for my three weeks "Tactical" Lewis Gun Course.

The train took me from Belah, and passed through El-Arish, and the base, Kantara, where the military railway ceased and the Egyptian railway began. Cairo looked very gay in contrast to the sojourn in Sinai, and it was a very welcome rest. Here I found one of the Company Commanders of the Somersets going through the same course, so we shared a room, and worked and pleasure-jaunted together.

Riding lessons, as well as a Lewis Gun Course, was the order. This had become a necessary consequence as the outcome of a number of accidents which had occurred on previous courses. Reckoning on an average the Territorial officer had never ridden before joining the Army. It had been his métier to adorn the office stool, and lead the sedentary life. There were, however, a few Australian Imperial Light Horse who were excused the course, so that, whilst we had to go through the

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hoop at six a.m., these gentlemen drowsed in bed for another couple of hours.

Certainly the horses we had to ride warranted a little instruction. Many of them were perfect brutes, which even the Australians had difficulty in managing. It soon became apparent that it was the early bird who had first pick; I consequently became the earliest of the species.

Every day we would ride out in squadron formation through the Delta country, or across the desert, to some selected spot, and plan the tactical posting of Lewis guns to get the best fire-effect out of the ground. We had very good fun, particularly when our instructor's horse, on one occasion, bolted right through the squadron from rear to front.

Brilliant sun, palm trees, and deep blue sky linger in the memory. We usually had the afternoon off, and went to the Club for tea, to the Zoo, or to the cricket ground where real cricket was being played. A much needed and delightful interlude.

Close to Zeitoun is the village tradition assigns as the place to which SS. Joseph and Mary brought the Child when they fled to Egypt. A typical Delta village, with flowers and deep alluvial land all round it to the desert fringe.

The sharer of my quarters was a good companion, and he had the quick end he probably would have wished for. Very soon after his return to the front he was sheltering behind a wall when a shell burst directly on him. His orderly, on returning to the place where he had left him, only a few minutes before, found nothing! He must have been a great loss to his Company, for he had been a pre-war Territorial for years, and had been with his regiment in India since the outbreak of war, returning to Palestine in May at the same time as our battalion.

It was a wrench to leave comparative civil-

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isation, and the evening singsongs of the Imperial School of Instruction at Zeitoun, and return up the line once more. At Belah we were haled into the Divisional Rest Camp before going up the line, a proceeding which took place at dusk when the ration-carts went up. Accordingly we spent Sunday there, and attended rather a curious form of Church of England service in the desert. The padre—one of the best padres I have met on active service—came out of the desert, apparently from nowhere, at the time announced for service, and stood out in the open without any sign of congregation, except myself and my companion. We asked him if it was worth his while proceeding in the circumstances. "Oh yes," he said, "as soon as I begin the congregation will appear; they are only rather shy," and sure enough, soon after the opening words of the service, men began turning up from behind sandhills, which previously seemed innocent of human presence, until quite a good little congregation was assembled. It was reminiscent of St John the Baptist crying in the wilderness, and, by the way, more or less the same wilderness.

That night our horses were sent down for us, and we started out upon our first journey "up the line."

At this time the Turkish Army in Southern Palestine held a rough line, and a very strong one, extending from the sea at Gaza, along the Gaza-Beersheba Road, to Beersheba on the East. Gaza itself was wellnigh impregnable with barbed wire and cactus hedges of the most fearsome description. The rest of the line consisted of various strong points, about two thousand yards apart, and the total length some thirty miles.

Our Army was extended on a twenty-two mile front from the sea to El Gamli, which is situated to the south of, and not quite so far to the east as

Beersheba. Before it had reached this position there had been heavy fighting, as well as much weary marching, and it may be well, the better to understand the position, to summarise shortly the previous actions which led up to the third and final battle of Gaza.

In August, 1914, at the battle of Romani, which took place some twenty miles east of the Suez Canal, the invading Turkish forces, after pushing across the desert, suffered a resounding defeat at the hands of General Lawrence, losing four thousand prisoners and five thousand further casualties, or practically half their total force.

Thenceforward Sir Archibald Murray steadily pushed the new railway eastward, from Kantara across the Sinai desert. The next objective, El-Arish, so long as it was held by the enemy covered all the valuable water supplies in that area. The Turk evacuated this without a fight, but had to be pushed out of position at Magdhaba on the Wadi-el-Arish, or ancient "River of Egypt." They were surrounded in a brilliant action by General Dobell, and lost over one thousand prisoners.

The next position in which the enemy gave battle was at Magruntein, a small hill near Rafa, the actual site of our battalion camp referred to in a previous chapter, and thirty miles north-east of El-Arish. This position was carefully entrenched, but an enveloping movement at dawn on the 9th January, 1917, and of a very similar character to that employed at Magdhaba, resulted in a complete victory, and the capture of one thousand six hundred prisoners.

With this action the Sinai desert was practically cleared, the edge of habitable country reached, and Gaza, the gateway of Syria, became the next chief objective.

Then followed the first and second battles of

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Gaza, to which a brief reference has already been made.

It must not be forgotten that these battles were fought before the railway had come up, and the consequent difficulties of water supply to the troops were, perhaps, the chief reason for failure. The ensuing pause in our operations had remedied all this, and everything was getting in train for a determined effort with far greater chance of success.

There were other influences also at work. The Turkish nation were tired of the war. Starvation and disease were rampant in Turkey and Syria. Supply was breaking down, and desertions were frequent. In addition, the relations between the Turkish high command and the German leaders were strained wellnigh to breaking point. On the other side of the picture one great catastrophe had occurred which was bound to have far-reaching consequences. Russia had just gone "down and out," and many Divisions were, thus, released for the reinforcement of the Palestine front.

I now found that I was to go back to the battalion in the trenches for a few days, then to the Brigade to understudy the Staff Captain as a preliminary to going on to the Divisional Staff. As we rode up we saw an occasional enemy shell bursting between us and our trenches, and heard our guns replying. At certain points we were told to ride singly, and particularly when we came within view of the enemy on Ali-el-Munktar, the famous look-out post for the Turkish batteries in Gaza. After riding so for some four miles we turned up a wadi, and through a natural passage with walls of conglomerate sand, into a kind of amphitheatre, with a great escarpment, or ridge, shutting out the view on the opposite side to the passage. In this amphitheatre, under the escarpment, lay our Battalion Headquarters, with dugouts scattered all



round; which, by the way, were anything but shell proof. But the Turkish guns always seemed to fire over the amphitheatre, and showed very little enterprise, despite the fact that a searching fire, in depth, would have found us out at once.

From a look-out post on the escarpment one could see our shells pounding the surface of Ali-el-Munktar, and, during the few days I was there, these completely altered its conformation. The Turks, in their look-out posts, must have had a pretty warm time. One would have thought, but for subsequent, ocular proof, that they were short of shell, as they mostly indulged in the game of shelling our batteries some six hundred to eight hundred yards behind the infantry positions. However, whatever the cause, counter-battery work is very welcome to the infantryman, to whose lot it generally seems to fall to suffer vicariously for the well-simulated and care-free ferocity of others.

Our four Companies were in the trenches somewhat in advance of Battalion Headquarters, and between that and the trenches was a kind of "no man's land" in sight of the Turks, with a wrecked tank—a relic of the defeat of the second battle of Gaza—sticking up in the middle. The trenches themselves were very narrow and deep; better trenches than we encountered later on the British front in France. But, had we been there in the rainy season I tremble to think of the result, for they must have crumbled in.

Beyond the trenches themselves lay "no man's land" proper, running up to the great stronghold of Gaza, and the ill-favoured, ill-omened-looking Ali-el-Munktar, which seemed to command every bit of our front-line trench. One had only to turn the corner of a trench to come full in view of his wicked, winking crest.

The section of "no man's land" immediately

opposite our trenches was known as "The Wadi Endless," and I think no name has ever given me a colder spinal thrill. Here it was, we were told, that an officer, of the battalion we relieved, had been wounded and left, during a raid, and had, it was thought, died out there without being found. It was subsequently discovered that he had not only been taken prisoner by the Turks, but was alive. Here, also, during our tenancy two men of some other battalion were left out during a raid, and got back into our lines, after wandering about for a day or more, without food, and afraid of being fired at by our own people. But worst of all seemed the lonely, terrible adjective "Endless." It was certainly as bare-looking a region as any I ever cast eyes on, not excepting that desolate Somme battle-field with its overturned tanks, pitted craters and supreme abomination of desolation. It was out here, too, that our patrols had to go, and a bad time they had of it.

There was one other feature of these trenches it will be hard to forget. The dugouts were simply infested with fleas. In some cases the men were literally driven out of them by these pests, which did more harm than the Turkish shells. My own dugout was particularly bad, and seemed to be right in the centre of the "game" area. Whether the circumstance that we relieved a Highland battalion finds a solution is debatable—with a bias against.

One night we experienced a considerable amount of rifle fire from a raiding party on our section of the line, which rather pointed to an impending attack, but, after a good deal of waste of ammunition on our side, and a few salvoes from one of the field guns in the rear of our position, the attempt, whatever it was, petered out. With this exception nothing of note occurred beyond the regular big-gun strafing.

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"Stand to" came every morning at six o'clock, but the Turk, then under the command of Falkenhayn, made no sign of an offensive. Perhaps he had some premonition of the thunderbolt being forged for his entertainment on our side of Gaza, and was engaged in guessing where it would fall; but it is more likely that he fancied his position impregnable, and that what odds and ends might be spared for Allenby would never suffice to drive him out.

Very soon my orders arrived to join Brigade Headquarters, and one evening, about four o'clock, I started for my new abode. Some four hundred yards from Brigade Headquarters' dugout a Turkish gun, which had been sedulously shelling a gun-emplacement opposite Headquarters, began searching the ground backwards towards the path I was on, and soon a shell burst close up, to be followed by another, and much closer as the sulphurous fumes informed me. I then decided that if I held on for the Brigade I might only reach it, if at all, as a casualty, and beat a retreat to a dressing station. The manoeuvre was made only just in time to avoid several more which burst all along the path. At this junction I was joined by one or two orderlies, and a goat, and for the same reason.

Brigade Headquarters was reached in the fullness of time, to discover the Staff somewhat discomposd. They had also been treated to some close ones.

On a subsequent occasion I saw the same Field Battery catching it hot and strong. Shells burst continuously all round them till it looked as if they must be wiped out, though, in point of fact, practically no damage was done.

Very soon after arrival the Staff Captain, who was to instruct me in my new job, became so ill

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that it was necessary to leave practically all the work to his pupil. To make matters worse, this state of stationary warfare gave the Staff Captain a good deal more to do than the Brigade-Major. Some idea may be got of the type of work to be faced when it is recorded that on several occasions it was necessary to wander about the desert looking for units hidden in dens and caves in the earth—with very scanty information as to their whereabouts—that arrangements for the accommodation of incoming units might be made: and it would be difficult for the uninitiated to believe how hard it is to find such places in this sort of country, where there are no distinctive landmarks, and it is necessary to seek cover from enemy observation as far as possible.

While with the brigade Headquarters were moved back out of the line for about a week, and then up again, and a trifle nearer the sea: and it was whilst we were "back" that I rode over to a Staff Captains' Conference at Divisional Headquarters, saw the A.A. and Q.M.G. who was to be my future chief, and was also introduced to the General.

A visit paid to the line to locate the cemeteries in our section, for purposes of registration, forcibly impressed upon the mind the grim realities of war. There had been, a few days previously, a small raid arranged on our section of the line to clear out the Turks from what was marked on the map as "Old British Trenches." These were now situated in "no man's land," and so constituted a possible jumping-off place for attempts on our line.

It had been my duty to see that the ration of rum was duly sent up for those who had to take part in the raid. On that night, from a small hill just above Brigade Headquarters, we had watched the progress of affairs, from the first burst of firing

until the rocket-signal which announced that the operation was successfully accomplished. The whole thing occupied little more than ten minutes, but it had taken its toll of British lives. All that now remained to servē as a memento of that small action was a little plot of ground just under the escarpment, a few rough, wooden crosses, and a few blood-stained helmets.

When we moved into the line again the Brigade was joined by the Wiltshires from India, and the Brigadier, with myself in dutiful attendance, waited long into the night for their arrival. We were just behind my own battalion, and I was, in consequence, able to have dinner in their Headquarters' Mess, and to see the last of our fine old Sergeant-Major, who was leaving for England.

He had never really recovered from that terrible march from Rafa, but he had done his work. He had seen the battalion launched on active service after training it through those years of probation in India. At Rafa, one day, he said to me, "You and I, sir, have a long trail to go yet." But the end of his service was actually then at hand. He died, at home, two years later of a sickness doubtless caused by the hardships of service. But he wrote to me from Ireland that, on his return to the depôt, the first question put to him by the young N.C.O.'s, who had managed to cling to home service throughout the war, was, "Well, when are you going back?" There is not the slightest doubt that there was a class of depôt-loving, home-clinging limpet who richly deserved a turn at the front, but who successfully managed to avoid all contact with active service in any shape or form.

A general feeling of expectation, at this time, was created in our Army before Gaza, and, with it, much speculation as to the great day of the offensive; or "Zero day" as Tommy has learned to call it. The

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Staff Captain's Scotch groom, out riding with me one day behind the line, pointed to the spot in the Wadi Guzzi—then merely a dry river bed, but later in the year a foaming torrent—where he and his master were posted at the second battle of Gaza, and described the fighting. But, said he, that would be child's play to "the gr-r-r-eat and tar-r-r-ible day" that was coming. As a matter of fact I think we all expected a terrific barrage from our side, and an even more terrific reply from the defenders of Gaza.

I was, just at this time, expecting to get short leave in Cairo, but the General told me that I had been applied for by the Division, and recommended me to forego the leave and go to the Division. It was arranged, therefore, that I should transfer to Divisional Headquarters as soon as my successor at the Brigade was installed, the Staff Captain being now too sick to do any duty.

## CHAPTER VI

THE ADVANCE FROM GAZA TO THE JERUSALEM PASS

*October 30th, 1917—November 18th, 1917*

“ All Christendom—they swept along (was never  
So huge a host!)—to tear from the Unbeliever  
The precious Tomb, their haven of Salvation.”

—*Wordsworth.*

AN evening ride of three miles to the rear of our position, with valise and kit bag, brought me in to report to my new chief, who was to be the A.A. and Q.M.G. aforesaid. I was advised to fix up quarters with the Camp Commandant, who I discovered had not, as usual, been informed concerning a newcomer, and was, in consequence, unable to find me a spot whereon to lay my head. He asked whether I had brought my “bivvy” with me, and I had to explain that in the trenches from whence I had come there were no bivouac tents, or facilities for them.

At this precise moment the Divisional Commander (Major-General P. C. Palin) happened to pass, and looked in on the Camp Commandant, who was also one of his A.D.C.'s. On hearing the trouble he immediately arranged that I could have his “store” tent, a “bell” army tent of the ordinary pattern. This solved the problem, and at the same time showed my new chief as being of the sort who have an interest in the comfort of subordinates. And it is scarcely necessary to say that very few such tents were permitted, for we

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were sufficiently near the line to attract the attention of enemy aeroplanes by any undue display of canvas.

I now found that my new duties were light compared with those of a Staff Captain or Adjutant, and that I was really meant to relieve the A.A. and Q.M.G. of some of his work, and give him more freedom.

Every night after dark there streamed past our Headquarters a constant flow of "caterpillars," blundering up from the rear with food, stores, and ammunition, in preparation for the great advance. The first intimation would be a regular beat, or vibration, then, over a sandhill, would come the tractor of the "caterpillar," followed by its train, followed by another, and then another. Hardly had one vanished before the next appeared, and so on in endless succession. It was difficult to believe that all these stores could be absorbed in the few miles of country lying between ourselves and the Turkish position. But it certainly gave one the irresistible impression of momentum, the gathering of strength for a mighty outburst to the address of the frowning Gaza heights.

At last we knew "the day," and, for three days and nights preceding this, there arose from our side a great, and long sustained, "preparation" for attack. Our big guns pumped death without cessation into Gaza, and, from subsequent experiences in France, it would seem that this bombardment was as terrific; in fact much more sustained than a good barrage on the Western front in the last great attacks of the war.

The gun positions lay in the area lying between Divisional Headquarters camp and the various Brigade Headquarters, being sited, as a rule, just in rear of the latter. Forty-pounders, five, six and eight inch howitzers, and some big naval guns of



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unknown calibre, in addition to the ordinary field batteries, kept up the game of long bowls.

From the high position on which our camp was pitched we were able to get a wonderful view of the night-firing, for it lit up the whole sky. This fierce bombardment included one by the naval forces from the flank exposed to the sea, and the practice made, so far as could be observed, was good. Not only did the houses in the town suffer visibly but our old friend Ali-el-Munktar came in for a further pounding, and beyond that, to the east, great spurts of black dust, "coal boxes," constantly rose into the air all along the ridge towards Beersheba, where the "strong points" were situated. The naval firing looked effective, and very picturesque, as the long, lurid streaks flared out at sea, but it was not possible to pick out the effect produced from the rest of the bombardment. It was a magnificent spectacle. We saw, in fact, and panorama-wise, the whole of Allenby's plans unfolding.

All day long, from the commencement of the final attack, the distant desert to the east of Gaza was covered with a winding caterpillar of marching men, and when these passed from view there still hung the rolling dust marking their passage. This was the Desert Column moving round the Turks' left flank, with Beersheba as their objective. Rumours came that their water arrangements had been broken down and had delayed the advance, but nothing was now going to stop Allenby's avalanche. A little to the left of this column we could see our big shells bursting continuously nearer in to Gaza, and between that and the sea lay the expectant troops, just on our front, ready to break out and overflow their trenches at the appointed hour.

Great preparations had been made based on a successful, or partially successful, attack on the main position. We had marked out the various dumps

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for rations, ammunition, and watering places. The light railway immediately in front of Gaza was very much in the picture, and precautions were taken to counteract the poisoning of the wells in the town should such occur.

The light railway had been made to economise transport immediately in front of Belah, and render more of it available in the Beersheba area. It was of two feet six inches gauge, and ran from Belah station to various points just west of the Wadi Guzzi. A considerable section of this line was in full view of the Turkish position, but no serious damage occurred. It was undoubtedly serviceable in getting up reserves of supplies and ammunition towards the front line.

When the hour struck our troops nearest the sea, to the west of Gaza, made a strenuous attack, supported by flanking fire from the ships, and, though they experienced heavy casualties, gained all their objectives. Those in the centre had an easier task as the threat to the Turkish flank, at Beersheba, was already being felt, and, in consequence, the fearful cactus hedges, and ingenious defences in and about the town itself, had to be abandoned by its defenders.

The attack succeeded beyond all hope. The Turk finally fled head-long, abandoning ammunition dumps and stores of every kind, and after him pressed our troops as fast as commissariat arrangements would allow.

The first night of the advance was spent by Divisional Headquarters in my old Brigade Headquarters on the hither side of the town. Next day we advanced through Gaza and bivouacked three or four miles beyond; on the plain of Philistia. Seldom have I experienced greater satisfaction than when I saw our troops streaming over the top of Ali-el-Munktar like a Peace procession, and without

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firing a shot. This ill-omened old mountain had, anyhow, fallen into our hands, and would no longer serve as a spying-ground above our troops.

The town itself was disappointing. In the distance it had appeared to possess "ancient towers and antique bowers," mosques, minarets, and palaces. On nearer acquaintance it proved to be but a squalid collection of houses, in the last stages of dirt and dilapidation, which, of course, the intensive shelling had not improved. But it is the peculiarity of every town in Palestine to look most impressive when standing on its hill, and, on nearer approach, to show the visitor its actual squalor and wretchedness. More might have been expected of this historic city. A city that has ever been the military gateway for the conquerors of Palestine. But, beyond its greater size, it appeared to have no distinction above the ordinary village of the plain. One thing at least was abundantly clear, namely, that a direct, frontal attack could never have taken so formidable a fortress.

When we reached the plain beyond the ground was littered with Turkish ammunition boxes, camp furniture, and equipment of every description. Some of the unexploded shells proved fatal to members of the Gippy Labour Corps already engaged in clearing up after the advance, and who, with their insatiable curiosity, could not forego handling them.

Progress was still maintained on the following day, and we were able to move forward some six or eight miles, passing dead Turks, and innumerable dead horses which had broken down in the rapid retreat. In this hot sun decomposition naturally sets in with great rapidity, and the result was sometimes almost insufferable.

That night I was instructed to assist the A.P.M. with the prisoners, who were beginning to come in

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in considerable numbers, and I then discovered that he proposed to hand them over entirely to my charge, and to devote his own energies to the regulation of transport during the advance. I, therefore, repaired to a small wayside village, where I took formal charge of a small guard of Gurkhas, who had already collected a few prisoners.

The A.P.M. showed me a small field surrounded by thick cactus hedges, just above the road along which our troops were advancing, and which he said should be used as the prisoners' "cage," because they could not easily escape over these hedges at night-time. I promptly pointed out to him that this field was apparently almost surrounded by dead horses, and that the wind carried down with it terrible, pestilential gusts, which would render it almost uninhabitable. But he only laughed, and remarked that, "This was war." Just so, but why have chosen an insanitary site when a better was available?

All day the various units of the Division, as they picked them up, sent in prisoners to the "cage," and I promptly impounded their escorts to form my Prisoners' Guard. In this manner I managed to collect quite a varied assortment: Wiltshires, Hampshires, Australians, Punjabis, Gurkhas. The prisoners themselves consisted of Turks, Armenians, Syrians and Bedouins. Quite a cosmopolitan crowd.

The prisoners were in woeful plight, also very hungry and thirsty; nor were we in much better case. There was certainly a well on the outskirts of the village, but no means by which to get any quantity of water at one time to the camp. The little Gurkhas, however, worked like slaves, carrying on, in relays, all through the night, to get an adequate supply.

Another characteristic of theirs struck me forcibly. I had no bivouac tent. My little pair of

waterproof sheets, which, attached to a small stick, had acted as a protection by night, had been left with Headquarters as I was doubtful whether I should be able to rejoin my Mess that night. But it was not till towards dusk that I noticed our little Gurkha Sergeant give instructions to one of his men, and then discovered that he was building the materials for a cheerful fire close to where I was sitting, cutting wood skilfully with his kukri. He then left his man there to watch and feed the fire all night through.

There is no doubt that the jolly little Gurkha, besides being a splendid fighting man, is fond of his white officers. These little men also developed an affection for our Hampshire lads, so one of their Colonels told me, and "because they were so thick." This expression might sound uncomplimentary, so I hasten to add that it referred to their physical characteristics only, and strangely enough, it is just how one might describe the Gurkha himself.

The Divisional interpreter was with us to help deal with the prisoners. He happened to be a wealthy English merchant, with large properties in Asia Minor, and so was naturally looking forward to a glorious victory, which would rid him of the Turk, and place him under the British Raj. It is to be supposed that the possibility of French mandates in Syria had not then occurred to him!

Towards dusk two Australian Light Horse brought in about thirty Turks, one of them slung across a horse. They were all played out, and this poor chap apparently dying; the Australian had, therefore, in sympathy, given up his horse. Among the prisoners was a Syrian doctor, and I got him to examine the Turk. Questioned as to his patient he replied, "*Peut être typhus*," and advised me to isolate him. So we placed him in a hole in one corner of the enclosure, with another prisoner

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who seemed nearly as ill. The latter recovered, but the former died before the morning.

This particular bag totalled some sixty to eighty prisoners, and I was very glad, next morning, to hand them over to a squadron of Indian Lancers, whose duty it was to take them upon the next stage down country. All through the night we had been much troubled by the insanitary surroundings before mentioned, and were in every other way glad to be quit of the job.

I was able to rejoin my messmates of Divisional Headquarters as they came past on the next day's march. From here we moved on another seven or eight miles, and camped on an open plain. Just at dusk, that night, no less than two hundred prisoners were brought in by the merest handful of Punjabis, who were themselves completely worn out.

The prisoners were in a lamentable state, many of them with dysentery, and all of them terribly thirsty. In the little time at disposal they were herded together, and lanterns placed at the four corners of the "herd" with a military policeman, or a Punjabi, in the absence of the angels of allegory, to guard each corner. I myself slept on the outskirts, between the prisoners and the General's tent, and fervently prayed that the whole mob might not break loose during the night, though they looked much too far gone to think of escape.

Here a characteristic Indian difficulty arose. We had obtained just sufficient water in "fantasses"—metal water carriers which can be carried on camel-back—to meet the necessities of the Punjabi escort. But these men refused to drink because the water had been handled by white men, and said they must get it themselves. This was, in the circumstances, impossible, and they were told that they could take it, or go without, and that, in the latter event, I should give it to the prisoners. At last, as

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the threat was on the point of being carried out, they decided to forego the claims of caste, and to drink the water of which they stood so badly in need. This incident only tends to illustrate and emphasise the many difficulties that arise in catering for a "mixed" Division under active service conditions. There is, of course, a certain nobility in the attempt to stick to the rules of caste in the face of real suffering and privation, but this trouble would never occur with the Gurkha, who makes his caste rules more or less subservient to circumstance.

Just before the dawn of the following day the whole mob had to be handed over to the tender mercies of another squadron of Indian Imperial Service Cavalry, and it was feared at first that a portion would be unable to move, but fortunately they all mustered strength to make a start, and got en route. I impounded the services of a Turkish Field Officer, a very smart-looking man, with a "Kaiser" moustache, to marshal them into some sort of order. He was ready to do this, but not to march with the rabble; so he, and two other officers, marched apart in solemn state.

I was mighty glad, following this episode, to be sent for by the A.A. and Q.M.G., and told that I was to do no more Provost-Marshal duty as he wanted help with his War Diary. As a matter of fact very few more prisoners came in during the remainder of our advance. The big push was over.

It was upon the following night that we bivouacked again in the open plain, in an entirely unsheltered position, and, of course, being so placed, one of the worst, and wettest thunderstorms imaginable broke upon us. On this occasion I shared a little "bivvy" with the "gas" officer, as we thought our waterproof sheets would be a better protection erected in conjunction than singly. We had a near "call" for a mule was killed by

lightning within a few yards of us, and the torrential downpour flooded me out in my section of the "bivvy," whilst leaving the "gas" officer high and dry. This struck me as being an "unfair ration," and he was awakened to hear about it!

Everything was so wet on the following morning that our march was delayed to give time for things to dry. Meanwhile our troops had been pushing on, and brushing aside, without difficulty, any rear-guards the Turks were able to interpose. Their back had been broken at Gaza, and their retreat had become, more or less, in the nature of a *sauve qui peut*. My own battalion's casualties throughout this advance did not, I think, number more than ten in all. One of our Brigades had captured the station on the preceding night, and, had more expedition been used, should have rounded up a train full of Turks. It was, however, a few minutes too late.

The last stage in this advance took us to a high hill just overlooking the railway station, at the junction of the Jerusalem-Beersheba railway line. The General always had a predilection for a bivouac on the top of a hill, and this happened to be the choicest in that locality. Not only this, but it was covered with aromatic herbs, particularly sage; the consequence being that I was quite satisfied when told, on excellent authority, that we were going to advance no farther, but were to stay there for a week or so, and then proceed some six miles farther west to a "Jewish Colony" village, which we could see from our eyrie, and then go into billets for the winter.

This rumour opened up a pleasant prospect of rest, after a good deal of arduous movement and exposure. And it seemed that highly placed officers were under the impression that Allenby, for the moment, rested content with the capture of Junction Station, and would now consolidate and reorganise before a further advance. We were now





AT EL-MESMIYEH; BATTALION H.Q. PREPARING TO ADVANCE TO JUNCTION STATION.



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right at the foot of the Judæan Mountains, which appeared to stand forth a formidable obstacle between our Army and Jerusalem—if the intention was ever to take Jerusalem.

We were, however, actually still in the fertile plain of Philistia. Away to the east lay one or two small villages, such as the "Jewish Colony" of Akir, and Katrah. Both of these contained prosperous-looking houses and moderately well-clad inhabitants, but, for the most part, the other villages were collections of mud hovels. The population seemed sparse and apathetic. Turkish rule had evidently acted like a blight. Some of the country had been well cultivated, but there were scant signs of enterprise. The local, political situation might be said to be non-existent. One conqueror was merely being displaced by another, and the country folk still left were neither hindrance nor help. Stringent orders were enforced against buying provisions from them, and against cutting down olive trees for firewood, or even tethering horses to them.

The Turkish armies were now at a very low ebb in morale; their plight in the matter of food and clothing woeful, and accentuated, as already mentioned, by the ravages of disease.

Our first night on this hill was also marked by a small incident. On waking and turning over inside my "flea" bag I received a good imitation of an electric shock. Being unable to find the cause I lay down again, a little harder, and the shock was renewed with great vigour. Two such shocks were enough, so I got out and found inside the cause—a scorpion! Well, it died very suddenly, and I woke my friend the "gas" officer—whom, it would appear, was immune from every variety of nocturnal visitation—to tell him so.

The D.A.D.M.S., whose tent was next ours, when told I had very nearly visited him for treat-

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ment during the night, assured me that if a scorpion the size I described had stung me I should be by no means so cheery as I was that morning! My prize scorpion was therefore hunted up for ocular proof, and it was agreed that no exaggeration had been attempted as to size, weight and beauty, but that—well, anyway it *was* a small one, and so eliminated the possibility of intense suffering!

Nor was the D.A.D.M.S. an Irishman!

## CHAPTER VII

### THE ADVANCE TO NEBI SAMWIL

*November 19th, 1917—November 26th, 1917*

“So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.”

WE were just settling down comfortably on our hill when a rude shock occurred. News arrived that we were to continue the advance on the following day, and, not only try to clear the Pass leading to Jerusalem, but to capture Jerusalem itself. Doubtless Allenby had kept this part of his plan locked in his own head, and had merely paused for three or four days to give the troops a breather, also to allow food and transport to get up. No doubt, also, news had come in that the Turks were thoroughly disorganised, which probably encouraged the supposition that they would not even make a stand in the Pass through which the road to Jerusalem runs, and where a few determined, unbeaten men might have held an army in check.

So, once more we set out in the rear of our Brigades, and, by midday, were held up at the entrance to this same Pass. We could see the enemy's shells bursting a little to our right, where some Indian troops were picketing the hills. The road itself, about a mile up the Pass, had also been blown up by the enemy. From where we were it seemed impossible to make any progress. Not only had the hills on either side to be cleared of the

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enemy, but no transport could be got up until the damaged road had been repaired.

There was then considerable debate as to what Divisional Staff were to do, and finally some of us, of the A. and Q. Staff, were ordered to spend the night in a monastery a little off the line of march, whilst the G., or Operations Staff housed itself in a sort of small wayside inn just in the narrowest section of the Pass, and where the road had been wrecked. It was called "Bab-el-Wad," or "the key, or gate, of the Pass." To add to our other troubles it now began to rain with steady intensity.

This new advance did not start well for us. No sooner had we found our monastery in the murky night when an orderly brought us orders to join the rest of Headquarters Staff up the Pass. This was a practical impossibility, for we had only just managed to get our transport parked in the monastery, and the drivers had gone off with the mules, horses and camels to find water. We had, therefore, to disobey orders, and a good thing it was we did so, as there was then quite sufficient congestion up the Pass, and no possible room for more.

At first we attempted to camp out under some olive trees, and then found it possible to get into the library of this now disused monastery. It is true that the rain beat in, and that it was desperately cold, but any interior was better than that exterior, and so we managed to pass the night. The books, I remember, were cast anyhow over the floor, but there was little or nothing among them of interest.

Early on the following morning we rejoined Headquarters to find that the road had now been mended, but that the troops were still fighting their way through the Pass, and had not yet, by any means, cleared it. Some months afterwards, when able to get a comprehensive view of the Pass by

daylight, I could not help wondering how we ever managed to get through alive. A few Turks with machine guns should have been able to have held us up indefinitely by such a route.

The naturally rugged hills on either side were difficult enough to climb when unoccupied by the enemy, and completely commanded the road. In India, where mountain warfare is so scientifically taught and conducted, the operation would have taken a long time, but there is no doubt that, on this occasion, we were out to take chances. As it turned out this policy proved successful, but its use might well have culminated in disaster.

From time to time we could hear the enemy shells bursting just above us upon the road, and for some time the issue of this drastic move seemed in doubt.

As I waited by the roadside, at Bab-el-Wad, I got into conversation with a subaltern of the Indian Imperial Service Lancers, who was awaiting with his squadron the outcome of events. Close by was a Veterinary Officer of my acquaintance; a good horseman, but one who loved comfort, and of a distinctly peaceable disposition—certainly no fire-eater. Suddenly we heard a horseman galloping, *ventre à terre*, down the Pass. Almost immediately he came into view and galloped up to where we stood, when we recognised him as the Major in command of the Imperial Service Lancers. Throwing himself from his horse he rushed up to the subaltern, and, with great excitement, shouted, "J! The General has given me leave to charge! We are winning clear of the Pass. Collect your men at once, and follow me!" "By Jove!" struck in my friend the Vet, "I wish I could come with you." "Come along then!" said the Major. "By Jove, I *wish* I could!" came the answer. "Come along then!" said the Major again. "By

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Jove, I should like to come ! ” but neither hand nor foot stirred.

The subaltern meanwhile was whispering to me: “ This is madness. A charge in this country, impossible ! It can’t be done. The Major can’t mean it ! ”

The subaltern was quite right. All these bombastics came to nothing. The subaltern never got together his squadron for such a purpose ; the Major never charged ; the Vet never went with him, nor can one believe that the General ever gave leave for such a performance. No chargeable body of Turks could ever have been caught at the mouth of the Pass, and, except on the road itself, there was not the faintest chance of such a manœuvre.

That afternoon my chief told me that Divisional Headquarters intended to get on and spend the night at Enab, on the other side of the Pass, as it was now nearly clear ; and, as I had no horse, he advised me to start at once. Night was rapidly closing in, and this being so I asked him if he was sure on the point, as I was not at all anxious to get separated from my unit at so critical a stage. He, however, seemed quite sure, and I started off.

There was, of course, great congestion of every kind ; transport, guns, and details moved up in the rear of the infantry, and, to enliven matters, it had again begun to rain heavily. An attempt to shelter in a cavernous hole by the roadside found it occupied by a field ambulance and wounded men. So, seeing a walled “ pound ” on the opposite side of the road, unoccupied even by the few Indian troops sheltering from the rain, I crept inside. Then I discovered why it had not been used. The only other occupant was a dead English soldier.

Finally I decided to push on again, and a mile or so farther on was infinitely cheered when the Gas Officer joined me, from the rear. He offered



me a share in his horse, which I gladly accepted, and so we walked and rode alternately. It was slow going, very cold, wet, and as dark as pitch. Mile after mile went by without bringing us clear of the Pass.

After an interminable period we judged we must at last be through, for we were getting on to open ground, and could see no walls of rock through the murk. It was so black, however, that there was danger of missing the track altogether.

Half an hour later we distinguished a faint light, and eventually found our G.S.O.3 by the roadside, sheltering near a few scattered houses. He said he believed that Enab was still a good distance ahead, but seemed as vague as ourselves as to its exact whereabouts. Subsequently we overtook a battery of field guns, and from this point the mud and congestion became ever greater. But another mile or two showed us a few lights, and we blundered into a village.

This was Enab, and here we found a fair-sized house in which we were informed Headquarters would spend the night, but which, on entering, proved to be packed with our two Brigade Headquarters, plus the Divisional Signallers.

Eventually we discovered a small room, and, the rest of our Mess arriving ere long, we packed into this small hole, stretched ourselves as best we might on the floor, and dropped into troubled sleep.

Just as I was dozing off I heard the D.A.Q.M.G. murmur, "The Turks are all round us just above the town, and we shall be shelled to blazes as soon as day breaks!" I lay with my head against the door, and, about midnight, someone tried to push it open and get in. I woke and spoke roughly to the intruder, who retired. The next day I discovered the nocturnal intruder to have been my chief, who had just arrived from Bab-el-Wad, and

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was himself seeking shelter from the rain. He actually spent the night prowling about without rest. Of course, he should have pulled me out, but on the whole I doubt if he would have derived actual comfort from my quarters, with other men's boots in his mouth.

The village of Enab is the last place of any importance on the main Jaffa-Jerusalem road, and about seven miles nearly due west from Jerusalem. It lies in and on the sides of the valley, at a sharp bend in the road, and running north-eastward from the village is a rough mountain track—towards Bireh on the main Nablus-Jerusalem road—which passes close beside the steep hill called Nebi Samwil, destined in the near future to play an important part in the operations. Roughly speaking Jerusalem was the apex of an acute angled triangle, with Enab and Bireh at either end of its base.

At dawn the overnight prediction was verified, for a shell or two burst in a hollow close by; and, soon after breakfast, they began falling all round. Shells were also dropping near Headquarters, and a good number burst in the valley where the Brigades were huddled together, trying to get breakfast.

A serious situation had arisen from force of circumstances, and it is not to be supposed that blame could be attributed to anyone. We had just cleared the Pass, and tumbled, at nightfall, into a position which, naturally, it had been impossible to reconnoitre. Daylight, therefore, showed, as plainly as the nose on one's face, that we were at the mercy of the enemy were they able to pull themselves together, and get guns in position to command the village.

That they had some was obvious, for we were feeling them. The shelling of the unextended

troops caused many casualties, but, fortunately, this shelling proved only intermittent, and, as was shown by subsequent events, simply a rearguard effort to clear the enemy's main body. When we walked into Enab the previous night we had been on the very heels of the infantry, who were, in their turn, on the heels of the retreating Turk. Had the enemy known our position that night we might have been scuppered. As a matter of fact they were in the process of being too soundly beaten to take any real sort of offensive, and this fact was probably known to, and relied on, by the High Command.

In the middle of that morning's shelling I caught sight of a Major of the Gurkhas sitting on the verandah of our house. He had been wounded in the leg, and was unable to get into shelter. I helped him inside and found that the painful process of stiffening had commenced, without much chance of evacuation for some hours. The evacuation of wounded from Enab was of a most trying character. Transport to feed the troops, and guns to support them, were pouring up from the rear, and blocking the already overloaded, single road through the Pass. The bad weather had plastered all surfaces with thick mud, and the only means by which the wounded could be taken down to Junction Station—twenty miles to the rear—was on camel-back. A "cacolet," a species of wooden cage, was slung on either side of each camel, and, as the camel moved, the cages rocked up and down, giving great pain to the wounded.

From Junction Station a slow train service had only just begun to run, which eventually took them to Gaza, from whence they proceeded by quicker stages down through El-Arish and Kantara to Cairo and Alexandria. It may, however, be readily imagined that the few trains it was possible to put

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on from Junction Station to Gaza were not of the Red Cross type. I think some "French" warriors, whom we subsequently met, had they been subject to the same conditions, might have realised that there were hardships to be encountered even on the Palestine front, with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.

Fortunately, despite a good many casualties, the morning shelling was not of long duration, and one Brigade was pushed, as speedily as possible, along the road to Jerusalem; the heights surrounding the city, with the buildings crowning them, being now in view.

The other two Brigades were formed into a single column, with its attendant transport, to push over the rough mountain-track westward of Jerusalem, until it reached the Jerusalem-Nablus road, and so cut off the retreat of the Turks northward of the city. It was a boldly conceived plan.

I was here ordered to assist in getting the transport of this column together, but found, in point of fact, that the less one interfered with the Regimental Transport Officers the better.

On the same afternoon the column started, and when the head of it had reached a point just below Divisional Headquarters it came under immediate fire from an enemy gun carefully trained upon that spot. The result was that those coming up from the rear knew that they, too, were soon "for it," and had to await patiently their own turn. It was naturally trying for both man and beast, but fortunately there was no disorganisation, and the whole column got safely over the hill, and away, with only the loss of a few camels.

That morning, at Enab, I was greeted by an old, bearded soldier, looking, as he limped along by reason of a wound in the leg, like one of

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Napoleon's old guard. At first I could not recognise him, but then discovered, beneath his bearded disguise, one of my battalion's best Company Sergeant-Majors, and a plumber by trade. He had been with us since 1914 and was then on his way down to the ambulance.

After the column left the shelling ceased, and we were left in peace; probably because the Brigade had made themselves felt on the Jerusalem road, and the Turkish rearguard had in consequence withdrawn farther into the mountains.

That afternoon the Corps Commander arrived, seemed dissatisfied with the progress made, and, with winged words, urged us to yet greater efforts. In point of fact we had performed some pretty good work in having cleared the Pass at all. In any case, when Allenby himself arrived, a little later, he expressed, I have reason to believe, his great satisfaction.

To us, at Enab, it had seemed a very ticklish situation, and the consensus of opinion seemed to be that we had, at one time, got too far ahead of our transport, and that a Turkish rally might have driven us back, in disaster, through the Pass. It must be remembered, too, that the Pass was our one line of communication for all purposes, which was even now almost inextricably congested, and foundrous to a degree. However, the cry was "Get on," and we pushed on, as I have already described, but, as will soon be seen, at heavy cost.

So far we had advanced no less than eighteen or twenty miles from our starting point at Junction Station, and the intention had been that, on the night of the day just described, our Division should be located on the Nablus road, after taking in its stride a further five or six miles of stupendously rocky country.

The Divisional "Location Lists" were indeed

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already typed out for issue and information, giving the exact map-squares on that road where every unit in the Division could be located that night. As may be supposed, these "locations" were never realised.

Half a mile or more out of the olive-covered valley, in which Enab nestles amid its hills, a stiff ridge rises, over which the track led down, by rough, precipitous gradients, to another valley in which a big monastery was situated. Above this monastery, and towards Jerusalem, rises the aforementioned hill, Nebi Samwil, or Samuel's Tomb, where the prophet was buried. Our gallant western column of two Brigades gained half the summit of Nebi Samwil, and there held on by the teeth. The Turks held the other half, and enfiladed our men with gun-fire from three directions. The enemy had their guns well in position, and the hilly track was so bad on our side that no guns could be got up to support our infantry attack, or help them in keeping down enemy fire. The Turks had turned at bay at last, and were putting up a stiff fight in defence of the Holy City.

My chief bent his energies upon every possible attempt to raise labour to get the mountain-track passable for guns. He was not, I fancy, aided in this attempt as much as he might have been; for red tape, even at such a juncture, made its ugly appearance. For four or five days our gallant troops clung to their positions and lost very heavily. My own battalion, who were on the actual top of Nebi Samwil, took a very noteworthy part in this severe action, and lost one hundred and twenty men. At one time some of our troops had run temporarily out of ammunition, and actually had to hurl rocks at the enemy to stop their advance.

My old Company Commander was badly wounded, and suffered all the terrors of that



MEN OF BATTALION H.Q. ON NEBI SAMWIL.  
CAMEL WITH CACOLETS FOR CARRYING WOUNDED.





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evacuation by camel. Our best Company Commander was killed early in the first day's fighting, and died within sight of Jerusalem. One of our finest N.C.O.'s, who had refused a commission in India, largely at my instigation, also fell at Nebi Samwil.

The whole Division lost so heavily that it had to be relieved, and this relief was carried out by the 60th Division. Even they, in their turn (though, by this time, guns had been got up) suffered so heavily that yet a third Division had to relieve them a week or so later. This last Division was able to hold on till the actual capture of Jerusalem, which took place about a month later, and as an outcome of the advance made from the direction of Bethlehem.

No doubt, although we did not ourselves effect the capture, the clearing of the Pass and the holding up of the large bodies of the Turks at Nebi Samwil (even though the Nablus road was not reached) did enable the supplementary advance to take place from Bethlehem, and so proved the root-cause of that victory.

When Divisional signs were subsequently used on transport wagons we took for our emblem a key. This was meant to symbolise our capture of the Pass, and more particularly of Bab-el-Wad, the key of the Pass, and so the key to Jerusalem.

At the time I could not help wondering why a direct advance was not made straight along the Jerusalem road, where our detached Brigade was operating. When, however, I came later to enter the city by that road I came to the conclusion that our High Command had good reason for not doing so. A more precipitous approach it would be difficult to conceive. It can scarcely be supposed, however, that the extraordinarily difficult nature of the country through which we were directed to operate was realised. It has now been stated on

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good authority that the reason for adopting this line of advance was to avoid fighting in the vicinity of the Holy City. When relieved our feeling was that Jerusalem had, once again in history, just failed to be taken, and perhaps never would be. We did not, of course, know of the additional cards the C.-in-C. had up his sleeve.

Two rather amusing incidents of those few days recur to mind. The Gas Officer before mentioned was told one morning that the Desert Corps Commander, and two other highly placed "Brass Hats," were coming up to Headquarters to be conducted over the hill to the monastery of recent memory, and that he was to act as their guide. Very nice indeed! But unfortunately he had not been over the mountain track, and knew the way no better than the "Brass Hats"!

But that is the Army all over. An official guide had to be found, and why not a geographically ignorant Gas Officer? He at least knew where the rough track turned off from the village, so boldly made the digression there, and struck up over the hill, hoping for inspiration. At the top he decided to establish a lead over the "conducted party," to gain, if possible, advance intelligence. As a result, though an extremely poor horseman, he rode down a hill like the side of a house, and, on looking upward, discovered the Generals dismounted and carefully leading their horses after him. Amazed and delighted at his superior daring he kept a trifle ahead of his charges, and, at last, encountered signallers, obviously belonging to some Brigade Headquarters. His actual objective was the 234th Brigade, so he inquired whether they were the 234th Brigade. Their reply was "No, the 233rd Brigade!"

Alas, he was undone, and at this juncture nearly fainted with dismay. "But where is the 234th

Brigade Headquarters?" he asked in desperation. "Oh," they replied, "with us in the monastery." So his heart functioned once more, and, by the time Sir Philip Chetwode rode up, he was once more a guide, and now a confident one.

A German lady's villa served as our Headquarters at Khuryet-el-Enab, and after a three days' stay we were told to shift our "Mess" into another house. We accordingly selected the house of the head sheikh of the village. Such a selection naturally involved a lot of talk with the sheikh, a venerable-looking man of superior class, who promptly delivered to us an address of welcome. It was, of course, impossible to understand a word, and finally our senior officer lost patience and gruffly demonstrated by sign and action that the address must be cut short; that we were jolly well coming in without further parley, and were, moreover, going to occupy his best rooms. These proved to be rather well furnished, but the furniture itself consisted of the queerest old ottomans and "what nots," all of which looked as though they required careful inspection for "game." Our D.A.D.M.S., however, judged that there was no need to be so particular, for, as he said, we could do the old sheikh far greater damage than he could do us! It was nevertheless a shock to discover how low in the scale of cleanliness one may fall with a little campaigning. I, therefore, register a hope that never again might it be possible to fall below the sanitary standard of a sheikh!

On the following day our relief was carried out, and our task performed. We had driven the Turk from Gaza to Nebi Samwil, and, though he had, at last, made a stand beneath the very walls of Jerusalem his grasp on the city itself was badly shaken, and was, though we did not know it at the time, to be shortly released.

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Our shattered Division now marched back over those hard-fought twenty miles, through the Pass to Junction Station, leaving the positions reached by the advance as follows. The enemy occupied a rough semicircle around Jerusalem from Bethlehem to Bireh, eight miles north of Jerusalem, and on the road to Nablus. Our troops lay opposite to them; the infantry almost touching them at Nebi Samwil, after repulsing two counter-attacks, while, on their northern flank, the Yeomanry, after stiff fighting, had fallen back to Upper Bethhoron, about five miles from the Nablus road. Farther westward Ramleh, Ludd and Jaffa had all fallen to our arms, together with the entire seaboard as far as, and slightly north of, Jaffa. To the south the 20th Corps had reached a point on the Jaffa road about twenty-five miles from Jerusalem.

General Allenby's despatch of December 16th, 1917, bears eloquent testimony to this phase of the advance in the following words:

“ Though these troops had failed to reach their final objectives, they had achieved invaluable results. The narrow passes from the plain to the plateau of the Judæan range have seldom been forced, and have been fatal to many invading armies. Had the attempt not been made at once, or had it been pressed with less determination, the enemy would have had time to reorganise his defences in the passes lower down, and the conquest of the plateau would then have been slow, costly, and precarious. As it was positions had been won from which the final attack could be prepared and delivered with good prospects of success.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### JERUSALEM

*November 27th, 1917—April, 1918*

“ Thy walls are made of precious stones,  
Thy bulwarks diamonds square;  
Thy gates are of right orient pearl,  
Exceeding rich and rare.”

—*Anon.*

WE bivouacked that night on our sage-covered hill, and remained there for a day or two; then moved nearer the sea, to the little village of Katrah, and camped in a sandy olive grove. There were two or three other villages in the neighbourhood, and outside one of them, at sunset, I came upon the village Sanhedrin, or Parliament, seated beneath a spreading tree. The assembly looked as though it had come straight out of the Bible, with its venerable patriarch, who might well have been 'Abraham himself, holding forth in the centre.

This is a fertile, pastoral country, and, with improved modern methods, might become very prosperous. But the country must have advanced but little through the centuries, for the patriarchal atmosphere is still present, and it requires no mental effort to recapture it. The flowing robes, long beards and picturesque head-dresses are the very same as those we studied as children in the picture-books at our mothers' knees.

From here we trekked again, a few days later,

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to a beautiful meadow surrounded by cactus hedges, and fine timber trees, lying right out in the plain.

At this juncture I made a journey by car to Junction Station, to procure some clothes and camp equipment from the Divisional dump. When leaving Gaza we had been rigidly cut down to thirty-five pounds of baggage per officer—which does not leave a wide margin for the amenities of life.

That motor drive was a queer experience. We careered over the open plain, dodged great, suddenly evident crevasses, and devised means of getting round them. It was the Ford car which proved itself the most enduring for this kind of work, and put to shame its more expensive brethren. With such recollections behind one it is amusing now to listen to the shortcomings anent English roads from the mouth of the Sybarite. But an old campaigner's comparisons never were popular, and one refrains, though the temptation is great.

One night, as we lay out under the stars in our little "bivvy," we heard the dreaded sound of bombs, and the constant whir of aeroplanes, whether enemy or otherwise we did not know. There was little sleep for us that night, for there was no dugout to crawl into, and we only wished, when too late, that we had made one. At Rafa and elsewhere we had adopted the practice of digging out the ground under our tents; the occupant could thus lie below the ground-level, and avoid anything but a plumb hit. Latterly, being on the move, we had forgotten all about the "terror that flieth by night." We now thought of creeping under the cactus-hedge, as a better defence than a waterproof sheet, but abandoned the project. But daylight told us that a bomb had been dropped not far off, and had accounted for some horses.

At this camp I particularly remember the exquisite dawns. We had always been treated to

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wonderful sundowns and sunrises in this clear, desert air, but, for some reason, the daybreak, morning after morning, at this time of the year (early November) was exceptionally beautiful. Little rosy, fleece-like cloudlets overspread the morning sky, grew ever redder, and then there crept in the most lovely green and violet hues, till, at last, the day was wide-awake.

Close to camp was an orange grove, with the golden fruit nearly at its best, and in the grove some old stone wells, covered inside with luxuriant bunches of maidenhair fern; not the small, hardy maidenhair, but the beautiful variety so much grown in English hot-houses.

Here my chief initiated me into a new branch of work, which gradually became my chief employment. Our successful advance was now bearing fruit in the shape of a crop of "Honours and Awards," and there was, therefore, a rush on the "A" Branch of Divisional Headquarters. My services were consequently requisitioned. This, as may be supposed, is quite a delicate branch of Staff work, and requires great accuracy to prevent blunders, and care to prevent the possibility of any jealousies between different units. When a number of papers have to be dealt with, in tents, sitting on boxes, with very indifferent writing facilities, the normal difficulties of the task, and possible loopholes for mistakes, are considerably augmented. It was, however, interesting work, and gradually one was able to take over the bulk of it.

Just as the bad weather appeared to be setting in we left this camp for Ramleh, which was to constitute our Headquarters for the winter. As we started the rain began to come down in sheets, and the route lay up a narrow muddy lane, enclosed by some form of hedge, which, with the passage of troops, soon became more than ankle deep in mud. The Gas

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Officer and I usually had to shepherd the Divisional Headquarters' party on the march, and, as the military initiate knows, batmen, and other henchmen of a Headquarters, are not noted for the excellence of their march discipline. We had, therefore, considerable difficulties to overcome on these occasions. It was a long and laborious march, and we were glad when, at last, we struck a wide, spreading olive grove, where our camp was sited. The choice of ground had not been happy, however, and the wet and misery of the first few hours, whilst we strove to pitch our shelters in a torrential down-pour, are a vivid memory. It was a strenuous fight against the elements for two or three days to even avoid being submerged, and I believe that all units, during this humid time, were experiencing a similar type of gehenna. It seemed that, the fighting concluded, the elements had taken up the struggle on the Turks' behalf.

Ramleh is, for Palestine, a fair sized town, with some considerable buildings of no great interest. But outside the town is a tower of great age, and underneath this are the catacombs of an old monastery dating back to the Crusades. This tower is a landmark for the surrounding country, which stretches away westward, a fertile plain, for some fifteen miles to Jaffa and the sea. To the north-east lies Ludd, with an ancient Church of St George, and from four to six miles beyond Ludd ran the British front, in a rough line across the hills of Judæa, from Jaffa to Jerusalem. Fighting at this stage, and henceforward during our stay in Palestine, was practically stationary.

After a week in our olive grove we moved into a big monastery, the largest building in Ramleh, a veritable barrack of a place. The cold and rainy weather had now set in, and this house had been built of great stone slabs for coolness in summer.



There was no fuel, and the resulting cold settled into one's bones. After so long in the open, too, we felt our incarceration the more.

Before long General Headquarters moved on to a beautiful spot, on a sandy soil, only three miles short of Ramleh, and, in a month or two, the railway was brought up to it. We were now, therefore, linked up with Egypt, and, in consequence, comforts began to arrive and increase. For a month we had lived on dog biscuit and bully beef, the consequence being that our tongues were still sore with the excoriations of the former, and our insides still groaning from the sameness of the latter. For a week corned beef, in every variety, is palatable, but long before a month has passed its excellences have sadly faded. Even on Christmas Day itself we were reduced to a roystering meal of "bully." This small point alone shows that our Divisional Headquarters Staff at least fared no better than Tommy in this war of movement.

It was interesting to watch the advent of the railway. The construction slipped along over that level, marine plain at a rate, I believe, of nearly two miles a day. On one occasion I saw, in the distance, some "Gippies" working like steam engines, positively running about with their baskets on their heads, and dumping the earth like men possessed. On nearer approach I discovered the reason. At one point was stationed a native overseer with a whip, who lashed their bare backs indiscriminately as they passed him, and, a few paces farther on, stood a white man in uniform, who applied a second dose of ginger with a hunting crop. The Gippies ran round in circles, grinning as the lash fell, and, apparently, thoroughly enjoying the game. I believe, too, that cruel as it may seem, it is the only way to make the Gippie work.

As soon as the railway reached the neighbour-

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hood of Ludd a wonderful transformation took place. Large marquees sprang up like mushrooms in every direction. Casualty clearing stations, ordnance stores, *et hoc genus omne* appeared, and a busy town of canvas covered the country. This meant that the new railhead was coming to Ludd. The very vastness of the preparations made us think that Allenby must be planning a further advance, and that the Syrian campaign had a future before it.

While at Ramleh I got an opportunity of visiting Jerusalem. In company with the late Adjutant of the Somersets, who had recently joined Divisional Headquarters, I drove in a car to Junction Station, and there boarded a lorry. As we went up the Pass we marvelled greatly at the recent feat of arms, and, when we had left Enab behind, and began to wind round the steep ascent to the city, we realised the truth of the Psalmist's words, "The hills stand about Jerusalem," and the same feeling was, I think, in his mind when he wrote, "Jerusalem is built as a city which is at unity with itself, for thither the tribes go up. . . ."

There it lies, enfolded in its own hills, but crowning the skyline, and gazing down on the farther side on the Valley of Jordan, and the Dead Sea. Lorries were busily plying up and down the road, and round some precipitous, unfenced corners the outside edge was anything but pleasant. Military drivers always seem, however, to drive with a special Providence looking after them.

At this date, as a result of the determined but fruitless attempt made by the enemy during Christmas week to retake Jerusalem, he had been pushed back a distance of seven miles on the east of the city, and about twelve miles on the north. The 60th and 74th Divisions were astride the Nablus road, and the 53rd in the vicinity of Jerusalem. There were very few troops in the town itself, and

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those one saw were mostly engaged in sight-seeing. A military governor had been appointed, and a strict system of rationing was enforced, food being very short.

The town had been in a state of uproar just before its capture. Enver Pasha paid it a hurried visit and, finding the game was up, fled with precipitation, leaving any adherents of the old régime to their fate: and now the motley crowds of every creed which form its population seemed quite resigned to the new order of things. The crowd which welcomed General Allenby's formal entry was itself a strange phenomenon, for an assembly of more than three persons in one place had for years been prohibited by the police.

The effect of the British occupation on the population followed, in fact, the usual course; from amazement at its moderation and efficiency to a placid acceptance of the blessings which it brought in its train.

On entering the city we bent our steps to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, only to find a French sentry guarding the entrance, and a notice board stating that the church could only be visited during afternoon service.

But we were not to be deterred by red tape from seeing what we had come so far to see, and what any Christian soldier had every right to see, more particularly if he had had the good fortune to take a hand in the winning back of the sacred shrine from the hands of the Saracen in this last crusade. We, therefore, ignored the French sentry and went in.

When we reached the little dark lobby which forms the ante-room to the Holy Sepulchre itself we were kept waiting, owing to the fact that someone was engaged in prayer at the Tomb itself. Presently he came out, stopped in the small lobby and glowered upon us. We looked at him, and saw to our

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consternation the strongly marked features of our Corps Commander himself. He merely glowered, however, and passed out. We felt rather like a couple of caught schoolboys, and the Adjutant whispered, "Let's get out of this lest a worse thing befall us."

We therefore contented ourselves with a glance at the Sepulchre itself, and did not loiter over the rest of the church. When we had got safely out, it occurred to us, for the first time, that the General himself had no more right there than we had, and was also contravening regulations. The thought was distinctly comforting!

The view from the top of the Mount of Olives is very striking. That is to say, the view of Jerusalem itself as you look back at it; for it is certainly one of the most striking situations of any town in the world; and the view, of course, which our Lord is supposed to have beheld when, in the words of the Evangelist, "He saw the city and wept over it." Another view, from a point slightly higher up the hill, showed us the wild wastes of the Valley of the Jordan and the Dead Sea, which was also grand in the extreme.

But judging from the respective positions of the old city wall and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre one doubts whether the latter is the true site of Calvary, as it is claimed to be. Were the "old" city wall nearer in than the church, so placing Calvary "without the city wall," the old town would have been altogether too circumscribed.

The Anglican Church of St George claims to have been built on the true one, and indeed, from its position, might well be the more likely site. Truth to tell the claims and quarrels of the different Churches in Jerusalem appear to be so manifold and conflicting, coupled with the traditions and superstitions which the various sects have fostered and superimposed on the plain Bible narrative, that

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it is practically impossible to arrive at a conclusion that may be anywhere near the truth.

Here we chanced to meet our old friend the Deputy Assistant Director of Medical Services, who was also visiting the city, and had a car at his command. He very generously offered us its use that afternoon, which we gladly accepted, and were thus, by this lucky chance, able to visit Bethlehem. During our advance we had once or twice imagined we could see Bethlehem far up in the hills, but had afterwards learned that the holy town our fancy pictured was another after all. The reality was very inspiring.

It was a wet, cold afternoon as we took the Bethlehem road, but the bold, hilly country stood out clearly at intervals. A mile or more outside Bethlehem we passed Rachel's Tomb, and I was told that our chauffeur, who had taken the D.A.D.M.S. there the day before, had been so much moved by the reality of all that he had witnessed that he burst into tears.

This incident shows the strength of feeling which lies behind the English soldier's phlegmatic exterior. He possesses a deep religious feeling, seldom plumbed by the latter-day parson, and our post-war empty churches only too clearly show the latter's inability to tend and preserve it.

Bethlehem stands on a good sized hill, and is, therefore, very striking. It is a clean-looking town of well-built stone houses, and curiously enough the note of squalor, so prevalent in the East, is absent. The Church of the Nativity, built on the alleged site of the Manger is, of course, from its associations, the most interesting building. Unfortunately the factious quarrels between the Christian sects, Romans, Armenians, and Greeks, are a sad commentary on the Christian practice of their Master's precepts. It is said that the peace had

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hitherto to be kept between the various sects by Turkish Guards. At any rate it was a comfort to think that it was now an English sentry who would fulfil this duty. The funeral of a member of the Greek Church was in progress while we were in the building, and our small boy guide was anxious that we should witness every detail; but we went to ground in the Catacombs, and took refuge there. The funeral was evidently a big show, and necessitated a numerous procession of priests and hangers-on.

The town stands out on its rocky hill, more or less encircled by old, gnarled olive trees, and the ridge of this hill is crowned with the long, narrow main street, off which lead various smaller ways. There are practically no suburbs, and, though no longer a walled town, it is still confined within its ancient limits, and probably much as it was in the time of David. Down in the valley lie the cornfields in which Ruth gleaned. The women of Bethlehem are said to be the best looking and best dressed in Palestine, which it is thought may be accounted for by the presence of Norman blood. Certainly the town has a prosperous air, with good shops, but, in spite of this, the whole effect is still in keeping with its history and traditions. It was, of course, held by English troops, and, as a fact, at this stage of the advance, the numbers of French or Italian troops engaged were quite negligible.

Late that evening we returned to Fast's Hotel at Jerusalem. We had taken the precaution of bringing a small ration of bread with us, and well was it for us that we did so. At breakfast the next morning we were given some tea, and one boiled egg each; and these, with our bread, was our meal. Sight-seeing on one egg, plus a keen, cold, tempestuous day, was hard work, and my Somerset friend, whom I had always regarded as hard as nails, nearly

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collapsed when we had ascended the interminable staircase in the Kaiser's pretentious church on Mount Sion.

The view from Mount Sion over the Valley of Hinnom, looking down on the traditional site of the "Field of Blood," is wild and eerie in the extreme. I can only liken the outlook from the Psalmist's Palace to a view over the most desolate part of some wild Scotch deer forest. It was a day of cold that penetrated to the bone, and made one conscious of the fact that David also must have had some experience of a wide range of temperatures.

In the summer Jerusalem is obviously very dry and hot, as the half underground streets testify. These underground ways are thronged with a jostling crowd, the most cosmopolitan it has been my fortune to run against. Every beggar from every nation under the sun can, it would seem, be found there. But though there is squalor in Jerusalem, there is a great deal which marks it out as unique among the cities of the world, and perhaps there is no place which, from its position, could be more worthy of such a history. It occurs to one that this city and this country are, after all, so placed as to naturally form the most suitable theatre for the revelation of the Divine. Situate at the dividing line between the East and the West, between the so-called progressive and the apparently stationary civilisations, there is a suitability in its historical destiny as the starting point from which the Gospel message should spread to every nation and language. But superstition has laid her devastating hand on the place, and has attempted to confuse the true with the false, though, on the whole, the impression left by the Holy City is one that strengthens faith, despite the misplaced efforts of religious fanatics.

The only activity on the part of the Turks at this time consisted in desultory fighting in the hills, but

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the opposing lines were practically stationary, and only small advances being made on our side. One night an enemy plane managed to drop a bomb on to Corps Headquarters, which were then about a mile away from our monastery, and the night before they moved to Jaffa. A signaller was unfortunately killed, but otherwise little harm was done. It was a period of organisation and recuperation preparatory to another spring at the decaying Ottoman Empire.

For a time I varied my duties by taking charge of a light railway which ran the rations up to our troops in the line. The trucks were pushed by man power, to wit, Gippies, who were incidentally in a very insubordinate state. Their contracts with the British Government had run out, and they were due for leave home. These contracts had, therefore, not been faithfully observed on our side. The excuse was, I suppose, the universal one, "there was a war on."

The adjustment of this trouble was really the job of my friend the Gas Officer, then away on leave. Every night, at about ten p.m., when the rations had been safely delivered to the regimental ration parties, a wire would be sent off to me by the N.C.O. in charge to tell me "All was well." Of course, the very first night I took over no wire arrived, and I was afraid my tenure of office would be inaugurated with a day of starvation for the troops. Next morning, however, Divisional "Signals" discovered the wire, which, for some technical reason, had got misplaced; so I felt my head once more secure on my shoulders.

The labour troubles became acute, and the Sappers began to claim our rolling stock for other purposes. When the Gas Officer came back I informed him that whilst he had left me a railway, as a going concern, I, in a short two weeks, had broken up his gang of Gippies, had lost his rolling



stock, and that I considered his best thanks were due to me for the masterly manner in which I had "carried on." In point of fact a better and quicker method of dealing with the rations had been discovered, and we could well dispense with our light railway.

The first beginnings of spring were making themselves felt, and the country round Ramleh began to look very jolly. The beautiful red anemone, which we know in England as a garden flower, was making its appearance, and carpeted the ground in some places with brilliant colour, varied with pure white, and occasional mauve blossoms which were almost blue.

But birds and beasts are scanty in this part of Palestine, due no doubt to the sparse nature of the vegetation. What few birds I did see seemed the familiar, small birds of the English country-side. These, and a mongoose seen one day close to Ramleh, were the sole notes of faunal interest.

With my friend the Somerset Adjutant I made another pilgrimage, this time to Jaffa, a beautiful little town, and precisely like the pictures of Palestine on which one was brought up. It is nothing of a port, for it has an open roadstead, and the blue Mediterranean washes up to the houses, but the whole effect is very picturesque. The salient feature, however, is the manner in which the town is embowered in orange groves, at this time of the year still covered with golden fruit, so making a delightfully gay colour effect, from some miles away. The palm trees give it the final Eastern touch, and, as a place to live in, this town of oranges would be hard to beat—in Palestine.

While quartered at Ramleh I was one of a Court of Inquiry appointed to investigate the circumstances attending the death of a Hindu bearer, and the wounding of a British officer belonging to

a Punjabi regiment. The circumstances were so remarkable, and at the same time so typical of a mysterious phase in the Indian character, that they are worth recounting here.

The subaltern, with another young officer of the same regiment, was on his way from India to join his battalion, then in the line, beyond Ramleh. The two, in the course of their journey, had just reached Ramleh with their two Indian bearers, and were put up for the night by an old Supply and Transport Quartermaster, whose Headquarters was at the Ramleh Supply Dump. As they sat in the Quartermaster's tent examining a revolver the Quartermaster turned to his bearer and ordered him to bring in tea. The bearer appeared to obey, but, before anyone realised what was happening, he caught hold of a large axe that was lying about, slipped behind his master's guests, and brought it down with full force on the neck of one of them, as he sat at table. The other two—the Quartermaster and the second subaltern—sprang up, and the latter chased the bearer out of the tent, shouting for a weapon as he ran.

The pursuit lasted for some time. The officer collared a rifle and some ammunition from a group of soldiers as he ran past them. The fugitive then took refuge in a cactus hedge, and, seeing a movement among the leaves, the officer fired, and apparently winged his man. He then approached more closely, when the fugitive unexpectedly took the offensive and charged down upon him with his battle-axe. The officer in trying to re-load jammed his rifle, and then he, in turn, took to his heels, trying to load as he ran, followed by the bearer flourishing his axe.

The hunter thus suddenly became the hunted, but, at last, cleared his jammed cartridge, loaded, turned, and, as the bearer charged, dropped him dead in his tracks.

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We had all the surviving participants to give evidence before us, but were quite unable to assign any motive for the astounding attempt at murder. The man being dead smoothed away many difficulties. The officer was not badly injured. It appeared that the dead bearer had not shown any previous malevolence to anyone, and no evidence of ill treatment was adduced. The Quartermaster, though versed in Eastern ways, professed himself quite unable to account for it in any way.

The only doubt I felt was whether this ignorance was quite genuine. It was suggested, though not in evidence, that probably the subaltern had treated his own bearer very badly, and that the Quartermaster's bearer, probably a blood relation, or of the same caste, had attempted to avenge his friend's ill treatment. This sounds far fetched to a Westerner, but it need not necessarily be so to the Eastern mind.

At this time leave to England first became a possibility, and to a few favoured mortals it was granted. Talking casually one day to the man who had the management of it at Headquarters, I conceived it just possible that I might obtain my share, for I had then been away from home for three years and a half. Anyhow I made the attempt; my chief backed it, and so did the General.

My chief was himself going, said he thought it possible we might go together, and asked me if I was a good swimmer. For, at this time, there was a lot of submarine work going on in the Mediterranean. Then my chief got his leave, and left, giving me his final instructions as he changed his clothes before leaving for the train. To cheer me he said we should meet on the boat. Hardly had he gone when news came from the Corps that my reasons were not sufficiently urgent for leave to be granted. The disappointment was naturally great.

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About a fortnight later it occurred to me to get up the file containing the refusal, and on re-reading it I said to myself, "This really almost asks for another, and more reasoned application." No sooner said than done. The "more reasoned" application went in, and in a week I received a wire announcing that my leave was granted.

Such is human nature that, no sooner did my friendly colleagues learn that my leave was granted than they proceeded to keep my courage up, when they met me, by going through all the motions of swimming.

On that very same morning, however, the D.A.A.G., who was now acting for my chief, came up to my room and said, "Look here, Bacon, I am going to ask you a favour, but I want you to understand that you are quite free to do as you like in the matter. The dispatch has just come from the Corps, giving particulars of the new list of honours and awards for the Division, and if you go on leave there will, now the Colonel is away, be no one who knows his views, and past history in the matter. Would you, in the circumstances, agree to put off your leave for a week or two and see the dispatch through, and I will arrange matters so that you shall get a leave vacancy then."

This was peculiarly bitter, but of course I had to express my readiness. I could not help feeling, however, knowing the Army, that something adverse would turn up. I was the more convinced of this when orders arrived for a fresh forward move from our monastery into the hills, close behind the line. Once on the move again it looked as though all leave would be stopped, owing to the possibility of getting somewhere from whence railhead could not be reached.

So we moved up into the hills, and camped on the top of one of them, with an olive grove climbing

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up its side. Just round the bend of the valley below we could see our men in the line, hanging on to the side of the hill like flies on a wall.

The position of the camp was truly grand, and, to add to our contentment, we were each allowed a canvas "bell" tent. The ground was carpeted with wild flowers in all their spring glory, particularly cyclamen, which grew among the rocks as thickly as dandelions in a hay field.

It was possible to finish the Honours Dispatch the day after our arrival, and I was sent with it to Jaffa by car, to deliver it to the Corps in person. That done I was free to depart, and the next day saw me on my joyful way to railhead, six miles off at Ludd.

## CHAPTER IX

ON LEAVE TO ENGLAND

*April, 1918—May, 1918*

“ Comes this memory of delight,  
Comes this vision unto me  
Of a long lost Paradise  
In the land beyond the Sea.”

—*Longfellow.*

GLAD as one felt when the moment for departure came it was, perhaps, partly owing to the wonderful camping ground, and partly to the natural reaction when a long-desired result is at last obtained, that a pang of regret intervened. In any case the train was boarded, and Gaza passed, then El-Arish and Kantara, and so on down to the rest camp at Alexandria.

This, my first visit to Alexandria, was made after dark. The usual, futile formalities were gone through, and the usual direction to the Camp Commandant's tent, or what purported to be his tent. The occupant of these quarters, however, was engaged in greeting a tall, distinguished-looking Colonel with the most unseemly hilarity, interlarded with ribald remarks which bore no reference whatever to our quest for a tent.

The brute was drunk, so it is charitable to suppose that we had pitched on the wrong tent, and probably this “gentleman” was, like ourselves, a “home bird” and celebrating the fact in a more

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noticeable manner. Finally, an N.C.O. was dug up, and the Colonel and I found quarters.

My new *rencontre* had been Adjutant-General at Jerusalem, and, for many years before that, Military Secretary of the Egyptian Army. He suggested joining forces, which I was very glad to do; an arrangement which, in the long run, proved to our mutual benefit.

The next day we got aboard our boat, a beautifully fitted-up Australian liner, the *Canwarra*. I was put in a cabin with two other officers, but the Colonel insisted on my sharing a spare berth in his cabin, which was more than twice the size of our three-berth one.

In view of submarines our course was to Taranto, and thence, through Italy and France, to Cherbourg. As it proved we had a four days' uneventful voyage, sighted nothing, and, except for our own "alarm," to see that everyone knew their stations in the event of trouble, nothing upset the even tenor of our way.

When we steamed into Taranto it was nearly dark, and there was, in consequence, some doubt as to whether we should be disembarked that night or on the following morning. Finally, just before the dinner hour, we were ordered to disembark. Naturally we protested vigorously, and, finally, the kindly ship's authorities put on dinner early.

While we were waiting and wondering I was told by an officer of the Highland Light Infantry that he overheard the following conversation between a couple of subalterns: "Well, are we going to get dinner on board?" "Oh, yes, I think so," and pointing to me, "You see the General has not gone ashore yet, and you may bet he will see to it that he has his dinner all right before he leaves."

As it happened there *was* a General on board, and this discriminating subaltern had mistaken me for the

great man. So much for a pair of tabs and a serious exterior!

My middle-aged appearance often played me a similar trick, to my no small consternation. For instance, at the Club of Western India, when making a humble entry, an immaculate young subaltern sat, dressed in the height of "polo" style. This young exquisite immediately sprang to his feet; murmuring deferentially, "Good evening, sir." Naturally I returned his "Good evening" with the best possible grace, but hurriedly made myself scarce, lest the genuine article should appear—and spoil it all!

Instances might be multiplied, both in my case and in those of other over-age subalterns and Captains, in those topsy-turvy days.

The rest camp was a tolerably good one, and very large. Thousands of officers seemed to be passing through for Egypt, East Africa, and India, in addition to those on their way home. To see their numbers was some index to the world-wide effort England was making. These were only for garrisons and side shows; what, then, must have been the total number when those of the British Expeditionary Force, and those training at home, were added!

It really would have seemed to any onlooker from, say, Mars, sent to this planet to report on affairs, that England was mobilising the world, and running it; with the single view of strangling the mad dog which had broken loose in the very heart of Europe, and had also infected neighbouring nations with rabies.

Italy and France threw open their doors, and their railways, for the passage of English armies. It was these armies that set the pace, that upheld the fainting arms, and stiffened the weakening knees. At Taranto lay practically the entire Italian Navy, not daring to venture out and try conclusions with



the Austrian along the Adriatic shore. It was left, therefore, for the English transports to brave the terrors of the submarine in the Mediterranean.

On entraining at Taranto the Colonel and I managed, in conjunction with two other officers, to retain a third class compartment, and a coupé. We were thus able, at night, to lie flat; a very great advantage, seeing that we spent ten days in the train, between Taranto and Cherbourg.

As we ran along the Adriatic littoral we passed a good deal of rolling stock which had been recently shattered by Austrian gun-boats cruising along the coast, and wondered whether they proposed to turn their attention to troop trains.

The pace was extraordinarily slow, even for a troop train, for after, as it seemed, travelling hard all night we found ourselves still only about twenty miles from Taranto.

Our two new companions hailed, the one from Palestine, and the other from the furthest Sudan, whither he had been relegated after having been wounded, whilst serving with the cavalry, on the Western front. All four of us were "Varsity" men, and so were fortunately met. To be cooped up in so small a space, without any kind of travelling comfort, for a prolonged period, requires congenial companionship if any measure of enjoyment is to be extracted from the experience. As it was we were as jolly as sandboys. We cooked, eat, read, and slept in our carriages, and, at long intervals, stopped between stations for an improvised wash, there being, of course, no accommodation on board.

At Faenza we stopped for the inside of a day, and had time to look at the famous pottery, and buy some specimens. There was a British rest camp there, but otherwise the war was not apparent. In fact I do not remember seeing any Italian troops in Italy. They were presumably on the frontier.

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The Italians were most enthusiastic about a British troop train. The whole countryside turned out and cheered us, waving hats and handkerchiefs. Whether they thought we were being drafted up to their own front, or whether the enthusiasm was simply on general grounds of gratitude to their allies, I know not, but there was no mistake about their friendly feeling. Perhaps we noticed it the more as coming from an Eastern country, where the inhabitants possessed that undemonstrative fatalism, which, in a detached fashion, merely suffers the passage of events, or the change of masters.

After some days of travelling up the coast we turned westward, and, crossing to Genoa, began, in a leisurely manner, to run through the Italian Riviera. March, which had brought the great German push to stricken France, was bringing out the lovely blossoms of this favoured region, and we had an unusual opportunity of enjoying the sight, for there was nothing of the Paris-Lyons-Mediterranean express about our progress.

Somewhere in this region I particularly recall the laughing face of a handsome Italian boy as he craned out of a window to cheer our passage. The sunny *joie de vivre* expressed in the face, could it have been caught and painted by a master, would have made a reputation.

The thought that would persist in recurring, when passing through this fairy-like land was, "how much better to let the train roll on, and spend the rest of these warlike years in some such retired spot!" But man is never master of his destiny. He is rushed to and fro at the bidding of other and still more powerful men. These latter probably sit in chairs, and, almost certainly, indulge in every luxury, while he is the instrument in their hands; a little cog of helpless machinery. Well is it for that man if the cause for which he is moved about

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like a pawn is a good one. Therein at least lies a quiet satisfaction.

At our wayside halts there were sometimes the most ludicrous sights. The first duty of every self-respecting soldier is to shave, and for this purpose he must "milk" the engine. So, as an engine shunted about, it would be chased by a mob of soldiers and sailors, with little tin mugs to extract hot water, like terriers worrying a rabbit. The drivers were always complaisant, and did their best for their various customers, but that no one was run over was a marvel.

These engine hunts were, of course, indulged in by the officers, as well as the men. Travel and dirt are great levellers. When the train stopped in the wilds without warning the carriages would at once vomit their occupants, who would spread themselves, like locusts, over the surrounding country, seeking what they might devour, or, more probably, some dirty puddle where they might wash. Always a backward glance was kept on the engine, and when signs of progress became visible there was a wild stampede from all directions. It all added amusement to the journey, and a wise "O.C. Train" winks at a good deal on these occasions.

On the sixth day we said good-bye to Italy, and then traversed the French Riviera, with the same stately progress. Here enthusiasm was naturally less marked. The people had grown more accustomed to the sight of English troops. Stirring events also were in progress, for the Hun was then battering at the gates of Amiens. We had, ourselves, some doubt as to whether we might not be stopped on French soil, and drafted up to that front, should matters become more critical. As a matter of fact we were sent well westward, to Cherbourg, no doubt to keep clear of the evacuating and reinforcing trains for the Western front.

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We were delayed for many hours outside Marseilles, and, while waiting there, the men had spread themselves, for two hundred yards or so, down the permanent way, which ran parallel to our train. A French officer came up to me, murmured casually that the express was just coming through, and suggested that I had better warn my men to get off the line. The news was at once set in motion, and hardly had the last man been informed before the train dashed through. On remonstrating with a railway official on the delay we were met with a grin, and, "Ah! There is a war on!"

We spent a wonderfully sunny peaceful afternoon at a rest camp just on the other side of Lyons, and wandered into the country to see agricultural France in its most peaceful mood. No sound of gun or aeroplane. No sign of the fury of war.

At one of our halts we were even able to gather eggs at a neighbouring farmhouse, and rejoin the train again. But our slumberous progress now gradually quickened, and we only took four days to traverse France. Everywhere in the back agricultural districts—the hinterland of the war—cultivation of the fields was carried on with, apparently, the same pre-war care and attention. There was never a sign of workers in the fields during the day-time, but, somehow, the work was done, and done well.

At Cherbourg, to our great relief, we were put straight on to a boat. It was my misfortune to spend the night at several rest camps during the war, never, I am thankful to say, for more than one night at a time; and anything more opposed to the idea of "rest" it would be hard to conceive. These camps were necessary evils, but let us now leave their mysteries of galvanised iron, match-board, cold, draughts, mud, regulations, Camp

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Commandants, and all the rest of it, unexplored, and forget that such things have ever been.

A good crossing to Southampton, after successfully evading the duties of ship's Adjutant, officer of the Watch, or any other form of military torture; a good meal at an hotel, and then the same old branch line, "Didcot, Newbury, and Southampton," which used to bear me home from school on "leave out" days.

It was jolly to see a little English street boy again shouting "Pi-i-i-pers," and to be waited on by English waiters, or was it waitresses, after three and a half years spent among "niggers" of every clime and race. But it was a shock to see women railway porters.

It was a different England, with none of that amateurishness which the sudden outbreak of war had disclosed. Those who had not been called up were at this stage either genuine indispensables, or so carefully camouflaged that people were unable to pierce the disguise.

"Oh to be in England now that April's there," at last gave its true meaning.

But all delectable things have an end, likewise April in England, and its last day saw me "wandering" again.

At Southampton I was astonished to meet my friend the Colonel. He had told me that he was not going back again. The authorities had, however, decided otherwise, and, though a very sick man, he was outward bound once more.

We crossed to Havre and went into one of the rest camps. The Colonel should have gone to a special one for field officers, but, being anxious to travel *à deux*, we once more joined forces.

On the following day we formed up in a long queue for the Marseilles train, the Taranto route

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having now been scrapped in favour of the old Marseilles route, and on the supposition that the German submarines were no longer a menace to transports.

Here a large crowd of officers had to be stuffed into some miserable carriages. The allotment proved to be some five or six in a carriage, so I begged the Colonel to take advantage of his rank, and forsake me, which, in the end, he consented to do.

My new companions proved to be good sorts. Three of them were A.S.C. officers, on their way out to Egypt, and one an airman who ran an hotel in the Sandwich Islands. The last named was a famous caterer, and had his uses on such a journey. Having brought a basket of food from home I was immensely popular; and what we should have done without it is a matter for serious surmise.

To give some idea of our train's paces when nearing Marseilles I would record that a man, left behind at the last stop, got to Marseilles in advance of us, and came up smiling to greet us on arrival.

At Marseilles we were marched, in mud and rain, up an interminable hill to a rest camp, where we had to wait, in endless queues, to receive a long oration on behaviour in camp and town from a fussy Camp Commandant; but, at last, managed to get away, procure food and look for baggage.

At this point everything in connection with our movements was wrapped in the utmost mystery, and we were told by the fussy Commandant afore-said that, at ten p.m. that night, our various orders would be announced to us. Worn out with travel we longed to get to bed, but had to wait with patience until he at last ascended the rostrum. At about eleven p.m. he reached my name, and announced that I was detailed to sail at five a.m.,

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in the hired transport *Kaisar-i-Hind*. I was also to be up at four a.m. to see my baggage loaded on the lorry!

We did not, however, put to sea all that day, but left, in the end, at some time in the evening. There was considerable excitement, about midday, when it was noised abroad that a party of thirty lady doctors and nurses were coming aboard, for Egypt. Naturally a "full house" assembled to see them arrive; such a full one that I thought, in my innocence, that the poor things would feel bashful. But I need not have worried: and fear, on better acquaintance, my dominant thought was, how should I fare if fallen, still alive, into such hands for treatment!

At last we were off, with a big convoy in company, and some four or five Japanese destroyers as escort. On this occasion I shared a cabin with the airman from the Sandwich Islands.

Nothing of note occurred on the first day, but on the second, a Sunday morning, and about seven a.m., I was gently roused by seeing, through the porthole, a crowd on deck in lifebelts. And a good deal more so when one of the crowd put his head in at the porthole and observed, "Haven't you heard the alarm?" I promptly roused the airman, who was fast asleep, and, flinging on some clothes and our life-belts, with a slight sinking in the pit of our stomachs, we hurried on deck to our alarm stations.

Here we found everyone already drawn up, and the O.C. troops and his Adjutant patrolling the deck in their pyjamas.

"Look!" said someone, "the *Omrah* is sinking!" Sure enough, as we gazed at the great Orient liner, next behind us in the convoy, we saw it visibly settling down into the water. The rest of the convoy held steadily on its way, leaving the

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sinking ship behind, and each unit no doubt wondering when its turn would be.

One of the Japanese destroyers went about to take off the *Omrah's* passengers and crew, but the convoy's course was the wise one, for had it hung about the fate of more of its units would have been sealed.

We were kept for over an hour at our stations, and so watched the *Omrah* fade from sight still lower in the water. The O.C. troops, to cheer us up, issued an order that we were to be ready to stand by at a moment's notice, as wireless messages had been received conveying the alarming intelligence that three different flotillas, of two submarines apiece, were waiting between the convoy and Malta to torpedo us, and that, in consequence, we should not be out of danger all day, Malta not being reached till the following morning.

As may be supposed we spent a jumpy Sunday, and when, in the course of the day, the siren hooted once all looked up from their various occupations; twice, all got quickly to their feet; thrice, all began to make for the saloon door. But the fatal fourth never came, and we casually returned, pretending that nothing had happened.

So we made Malta safely, and steamed slowly in and up the buoyed channel, through the mine field, and the raised boom. The unfortunate *Omrah* passengers were the last to be berthed in their swaying destroyer, suffering, in addition to their other troubles, the tortures of sea-sickness.

We were all glad to get ashore, and, as I was returning down the main street I caught sight of a miserable, dejected-looking tramp, in ragged-looking trousers, an old British Warm, half an inch of beard, and naked feet, slowly making his way up it. I was passing him by when something familiar in his appearance arrested my attention,



and I looked again. To my astonishment I was greeted by him, and it turned out to be my friend the Colonel, in what few garments he had obtained in the scramble following the alarm on the *Omrah*. The ragged trousers were his pyjamas.

Never could I have conceived it possible that so rapid a descent from a smart, distinguished-looking Staff Officer to the counterpart of a wayside tramp could be made. "Dress does make a difference, Davy!"

I promptly asked him if I could lend him any money, and he warmly acquiesced in a loan to procure more suitable clothing. Hardly had the money passed when I was accosted by a fellow tramp, asking whether I could lend *him* a bit. This proved to be no less than a full-blown Colonel, who commanded all the Egyptian Labour Corps serving under Allenby, and quite a familiar figure "up the line." My momentary hesitation to the issue of another loan—there were acute possibilities of further importunity, and I am not related to the Rothschild family—was evidently spotted, for the second applicant said that he thought he could manage. I was then able to explain my own lightness of pocket. They both said they were going to stay a week in Malta to refit, and come on by a later boat, so we bade one another a mutual farewell.

But we should never have touched in at Malta had it not been for the torpedoing of the *Omrah*. At the fatal moment she was very close to our ship, something like a ship's length astern, and it was thought that the torpedo had been intended for us, as being the largest vessel in the convoy. Subsequent events also lent some colour to this theory.

In any case the working of fate was curiously exemplified, for the *Omrah* was the boat which

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accommodated most of the Staff Officers, so that had my friend the Colonel pursued his original intention he would, in all probability, have been put on board the *Kaisar*, and so have escaped his unpleasant experiences.

It appeared that there was a well-known haunt of submarines in the shoaling water at the entrance to Alexandria Harbour, and we knew, therefore, that our danger would not lie behind us till we were actually ashore. Nothing happened, however, and we came alongside the quay, expecting to get a day to see the town. However, an Embarkation Officer came off to tell us that we were not to be allowed ashore at all, but, on the contrary, would spend the night aboard, and leave for Palestine by train from the dock side early on the following morning.

Much discontent was caused by this decision, and, towards nightfall, some of the unruly element determined to show their dislike by outward manifestations of high spirits. Meanwhile our "ministering angels" had gone ashore, and were spared the "rag," though it is doubtful whether some of them would have minded it. This opinion may perhaps seem ungallant and far-fetched to the reader, but the following incident will provide some idea of the length to which breaches of discipline and ordinary refinement were carried at the hands of those to whom mere man looks for the best of everything.

At almost our last meal one of these young women, instead of taking the place at table allotted her with her own sex, and according to troop-ship regulations, placed herself at our table, and in the place of one of the officers who sat opposite me. When he came in she refused to budge an inch. He at first treated this lapse of discipline and good manners jocularly, expecting her soon to move.

But she never did, and he finally had to find a place elsewhere.

On landing we discovered that we had to be our own porters to the train, but, soon afterwards, were ourselves being carried through the now familiar Delta country, and over the barren desert towards Kantara.

The chief excitement on these journeys is embodied in the ingenuity required for the collection of food. Facilities here are of the poorest, and one's knowledge as to the duration of the journey equally so, the consequence being that there is always something to keep interest, of a sort, going.

Arrived in Kantara, and whilst preparing for the next stage of the journey into Palestine, I heard, quite casually, that my battalion was only two miles up the road, to the east of Kantara! This intelligence was by way of being a surprise, because our Division was a "mixed" one, and although it was well known that many of Allenby's best troops were being sent to France, one never dreamed for an instant that any white troops would be taken from a "mixed" white and black Division.

I had actually travelled back with officers from other Divisions who knew that they were shortly going to France, but it looked in any case certain that the 75th Division would be left to face the Turk. I also learned a more important fact, that, in most cases, officers extra-regimentally employed had been sent back to their battalions.

In the circumstances it became a question as to whether the proper course was to return to Divisional Headquarters or to my battalion. In any event it seemed that a visit to the battalion, and a talk to my old Commanding Officer, was a first, plain duty.

## CHAPTER X

FROM PALESTINE TO FRANCE

*May, 1918—June, 1918*

“ Swiftly the great ship glides,  
Her storms forgot, her weary watches past;  
Northward she glides, and through the enchanted haze,  
Faint on the verge her far hope dawns at last.”  
—*Newbolt.*

ARRIVED at Kantara it became necessary to acquire a new helmet. The hot season had now begun, and in this arid country, close down to the Ismailia Canal, the heat was intense.

I soon found my battalion C.O., who said he was pleased, but very much surprised, to see me, and refused to influence any decision I might be free to make for the future, but suggested wiring to the Division for instructions. The battalion was then on the eve of departure for France, having spent the last month in coming slowly down from the front; but without its final orders.

This meant some debate as to the best course to pursue, and as an outcome of this I told him that I would take no action with the Division as perhaps leading to complications, but simply join up and go to France. He quite agreed to this course. So baggage was got up to the rest camp, and the matter settled.

Probably the factor that had had most influence was a thoroughly restless feeling; a kind of travelling fever. So many miles had been covered during the last two months that the settling-down feeling was absent. Probably, also, a sense of

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being separated from the battalion, and a surfeit of Staff life, had something to do with it.

In any case the choice was not the outcome of anxiety to eat fire on the French front, though either choice would almost certainly lead to the same lethal goal, for, at that time, things looked pretty ugly on the Palestine front. The hot season was beginning. The doctors thought our projected, new advance would lie through the most malarious, typhus-stricken belt of country, and that large numbers would succumb. The Turk himself seemed to be getting very active, and, what was more important, recovering his nerve.

I also reckoned on my old Company Commander being on the spot, but, as luck would have it, the very day we started for France he was carried off to hospital with scarlet fever, and never again rejoined the battalion. As a fact, of all the original battalion officers there now survived but the Colonel and three of the Company Commanders.

Being now naturally pretty rusty in ordinary Company affairs I suggested to the Colonel that I should probably be of more service as Assistant Adjutant than with a Company. And so it was settled.

Two days later we received our orders to move, and, up to that date our casualties stood as follows :

	Killed.		Wounded.		Missing.
	Officers.	Other Ranks.	Officers.	O.R.	O.R.
In the fighting during the advance to Jerusalem . . . .	2	20	7	135	5
In the subsequent fighting . . . .	0	13	6	53	0
	2	33	13	188	5

and the honours so far obtained were :

M.C.	.	.	.	.	1
Croix de Guerre	.	.	.	.	1
D.C.M.	.	.	.	.	2
M.M.	.	.	.	.	3
Mentions	.	.	.	.	2

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As we had been engaged in an entirely victorious campaign, in which the battalion had borne a by no means insignificant part, the rewards had certainly not been over done. But then it is fairly common knowledge, which the personal Staff work of the last few months could not contradict, that the proportion of honours awarded to any particular unit rest largely upon two factors, the literary powers of the C.O., and his quality of pushfulness. The 'gallantry, or merit, of the unit represents the background to the picture in most cases.

An uneventful journey down to "Alex" was enlivened by the upsetting of a bottle of beer over the Padre's new breeches. The said Padre, it should be recorded, had just been mentioned in despatches for gallant work at the base (Kantara) during the last few months. "Honour to whom honour is due."

At "Alex" we detrained, and were drawn up opposite the transport destined to take us to France; and I noticed at once that there was something familiar about the boat. I had good reason, for there rested the old *Kaisar-i-Hind* just where I had left her. On going aboard I happened to meet the steward who had looked after me on the way out, and he nearly dropped the crockery he carried. It had not occurred to the simple soul that the ways of the War Office, like those of the heathen Chinese, are childlike and bland, and not by any means the same as other men's ways.

It is always necessary to report to the War Office when on leave; why, therefore, could not a man have been, in such a case, instructed to rejoin his regiment in France on its arrival there, and so save his country expense—and himself the full term of his leave!

With our own there were no less than three

## FROM PALESTINE TO FRANCE

battalions aboard, the other two being Irish battalions. We were shown our boat stations, but were carefully told not to get into the boats, following an alarm, as there would not be room for all. Actually the boats would first be lowered with their crews, the life rafts would be thrown overboard, and every one could then take to the water. So, at the very least, a good ducking was in prospect. It was rumoured that, in face of this stark intelligence, an antiquated Staff Officer sought the Captain to request that an exception to this rule might be made in the case of Staff Officers. It was also rumoured that he left the Captain with a flea in his ear.

Hardly had Alexandria faded from view in the broad daylight of a beautiful sunny morning when there was a cry of "Man overboard!" Orders, in such an event, were that no steps were to be taken to save him, as it endangered many thousands of lives to heave to. Nevertheless, a boat was lowered, and the man picked up and taken back to "Alex," where, it is to be hoped, he was faithfully dealt with; for he went overboard on purpose.

For one large convoy of seven or eight big ships to leave port in broad daylight, and just after another convoy had arrived, seemed to be inviting trouble. The advertisement of existence seemed too big in that narrow gut of shoaling water.

In the small hours of our very first night out we were roused by those four dreaded hoots, and there followed the nightmare of huddled-on clothes; the rush to stations in the sullen, grey dawn; the crowded, gloomy decks; the half light over the dreary waste of waters; the gnawing suspense.

My former experience had occurred in broad daylight, which condition helps the spirit in every

## WANDERINGS OF A TEMPORARY WARRIOR

man to decline belief in the possibility of death. But in this cold half dawn it seemed only too close, with the added thought that the second time might not be so lucky.

Again the ship next astern of us was sinking; this time the *Leasowe Castle*. So we waited and shivered, and the dawn crept on, till, at last, grew the hope that danger had once more been surmounted.

Just after the *Leasowe Castle* was struck there had been a shot or two from the Japanese escort, probably at the swirl in the water caused by the passage of the torpedo, and a destroyer dropped a depth charge. About an hour or so of this tension and we were dismissed to our cabins, though we had no means of knowing the fate of those aboard the *Castle* boat. The *Kaisar*, however, still ploughed bravely on with her freight of three thousand human lives, which, it seemed, were to be spared to fight another day.

I suppose in the days of the *Royal George* there would have been a cry of horror from the whole civilised world, and some poet would have embodied the episode in stately verse. But at this stage in the Great War probably few but the relatives of the drowned would ever hear of the disaster.

Actually some of those aboard the *Leasowe Castle* went down with her, but we subsequently received a wireless to tell us that two Hampshire officers had been taken off safely, though we had no conception, at the time, whom they might be. These eventually turned out to be two who had been away sick when the battalion left, and had not been evacuated from hospital in time to rejoin before the battalion embarked. They actually missed the *Kaisar* by inches.

We soon settled down again, and the voyage



resumed its usual features, but I often looked at the luxurious fittings of this great, converted liner with a feeling of incredulity that so much comfort and security might at any moment be suddenly transformed into a huddled wreck upon the seabed.

We touched nowhere, and, in due course, reached Marseilles; when there was some post-excitement on a circulated rumour that we had been hit by a "dud" torpedo during the night, and just outside port; but the truth or otherwise of the report never transpired.

So we disembarked, formed up, marched the battalion through the goodly town of Marseilles, and out to a camp some three or four miles away. It was a hot, dusty march, but the Marseillais were enthusiastic when our band played us through the leafy streets to a good rousing tune, and, at any rate here, there was something of the pomp and circumstance of war. These sun-browned warriors from the East, pouring in to resist the Prussian onslaught, were a good augury that England's hand was yet mighty to strike. Our Second-in-Command, like the rest of us, had been ordered to march, but the Colonel had pity on him in the end, and his lorry drive probably saved him to the regiment!

We spent the night in camp with the two Irish battalions, and, next day, there was a great shedding of heavy baggage, another march to entrain, and we were off again towards the north, and the sound of the guns.

The Mess had rather expected that a battalion with an overseas service of three and a half years, and no home leave, would have been granted a short breathing space. The Division preceding us was in the same category, and had been promised leave while at "Alex," though, up to date, the promise had not been honoured. Doubtless the exigencies

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of the war forbade it, and thus an illustration of the great drain on our man power.

This preceding Division, however, had been so disgruntled that they had considered it necessary as a protest to leave a lurid trail through France. The consequence being that, whenever we stopped on our three days' journey, we were met with some trepidation by the R.T.O.'s, who expected our men also to break out and loot the town. They found, however, that they had a very different class of soldier to deal with.

The Hampshire man, though second to none as a fighting man, has too much natural good discipline in his make up to run amok, whatever the apparent grievance. He feels it, but loyally submits. It was as fine an example of patriotism as the war brought forth. Sad, indeed, it is to record that many of these brave men fell, with their faces to the enemy, before they ever got that longed-for leave, and another sight of their dear ones at home. *Sunt lacrimæ rerum.*

The rolling stock assigned us was of the oldest, and, during one night, the couplings between two wagons broke, with the result that part of the battalion ran backwards for a space, down an incline, while the remainder continued its journey.

At Doullens, beyond Amiens, we were met by Staff Officers from our new Division, which we then learned, for the first time, was the 62nd (West Riding). We also learned that we were not going on leave, but were going, shortly, into the front line. Our Division was then holding the Bucquoy sector, where, during the recent German push, they had been brought up to "stem" the on-rush, and had succeeded in holding a line there, although other formations were still moving to the rear.

We then marched out some six miles to camp

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at Amplier, and very soon came across big shell holes in the fields by the roadside made by 5.9's. Doullens itself was like a city of the dead, with the houses all shuttered up and the inhabitants fled to safer quarters. It was a gloomy bit of that pleasant land of France in those days.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE BUCQUOY TRENCHES

*June, 1918—July 14th, 1918*

“ Wisdom, Self-Sacrifice, Daring, and Love,  
Haste to the battle-field, stoop from above,  
To the Day of the Lord at hand.”

—*Kingsley.*

AMPLIER was quite a charming little old-world village, and we were met there by our new Brigade Staff, who, by their attention to detail, showed that they meant to look after us. At night we were not allowed to show a light, and the hutments in which the Companies were accommodated were full of “visitors,” but, otherwise, we seemed to have dropped on to a good place to “rest.”

The most important part of our training now consisted in learning the speedy use of gas respirators. Whole battalions had recently been knocked out by gas, and the authorities were consequently determined that the resulting casualties should be minimised, as far as training could do it. Against the Turk, though we carried gas protection, we had never had to make use of it; hence the need, now, to practise it.

It was the height of the French summer, and though, after our years in the tropics, it did not appear the real thing, the woods and fields were delightfully fresh to eyes accustomed to the desert.

It is worthy of mention that our M.O., at this time,

was an extremely black, curly haired negro from the British West Indies; thus showing the shortage of medical personnel. We changed him ere long for an English doctor!

Two days after our arrival the Brigadier, and the Divisional General (Sir Walter Braithwaite) inspected us. The latter made a short speech, in which he told us of the past doings of the 62nd Division, and said that, though inexperienced in trench warfare we should soon be put through our paces, and shown how to look after ourselves, by the veteran troops of the Division. He did not, of course, know it, but this information caused considerable feeling among several of our subalterns, who were "French" warriors of some standing or ever they joined us in Palestine. In point of fact, some of them had actually been N.C.O.'s in the trenches when the 62nd first came out to France, and it had fallen to their lot to instruct the men of the 62nd in methods of trench warfare!

Soon after arrival I was sent up to Souâstre, where Rear Headquarters of the Brigades and battalions in the trenches lay, to arrange for our reception with a view to instruction in the trenches. The first officer I encountered there was a pleasant, young-looking man, whom I found talking to the Staff Captain. Seeing that I was fagged he said to the latter, "Don't you talk business with him now, but bring him in and give him some tea first of all." And the Staff Captain took the hint.

I found out, afterwards, that this tactful, boyish-looking man was the Colonel of a York and Lancaster battalion to whom our own Battalion Headquarters were to be attached for instruction. This little incident shows that the good soldier, and leader of men, is usually also the kind and tactful gentleman, and not the lobster-faced martinet of legend. This man, as I imagined he would be, proved a

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well-known and exceptionally fine Commanding Officer.

The very next day the first party left the battalion for the trenches. The Second-in-Command and myself, representing Battalion Headquarters, went to learn our respective duties.

As we stood, drawn up in the château yard, just prior to departure for Souâstre by lorry, our Padre approached me with a Kodak, and the request, "Oh, let me take a photo of you so that in case you are killed I can send it home to your family." He was answered by a chilly silence. Not content with this rebuff he then approached a party of N.C.O.'s, saying, "Well, boys, let me take a snap as a little reminder for your families if anything happens to you." Needless to say the N.C.O.'s also treated him with the cold shoulder, and further comment is needless.

It was dark when our lorry reached Souâstre, and, after a short halt, we were given a couple of guides and set off on foot. Each man carried his own pack, which had all we needed, or rather could carry, for use in the trenches. It was a truly desolate region over which we tramped. A natural desert is all very well, but a smiling land like Picardy laid waste by the hand of man is uncanny and depressing. Barbed wire and shell holes, with perhaps a blasted tree or so thrown in, were the only features in this weary expanse. About a mile out some shells came over, but pitched several hundred yards away on the other side of our track. At advanced Brigade Headquarters we had a short halt, and then got into the network of trenches. After wandering about for a long time we began to suspect our guides had lost their way, and, being pressed on the point, they admitted as much. But they still retained a sense of the correct direction, and, after one or two bad shots, we managed to get right again.

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Before long it became obvious that we had reached the front line all right. Shot and shell of every description, from trench mortars and big guns to rifles and machine-guns, rent the air, while rockets or V\'ery lights went up in all directions. It certainly was wonderful that such storms of lead should have so little apparent effect. Nothing fell very near, and yet we seemed to be pretty near the centre of this witches' cauldron.

Arrived at a narrow cut trench, in which were the dugouts of the York and Lancasters' Headquarters, we dived into the ground down some twenty steps, and found the cave which formed the Orderly Room, Signallers' Headquarters, rendezvous, and sleeping place of the Battalion Headquarters. We were warmly greeted, and, after the various N.C.O.'s had been detailed off to their respective opposites for instruction during the next few days, the Second-in-Command and myself were attached to their Commanding Officer and Adjutant respectively, to learn our jobs.

Almost immediately the Adjutant wanted to go round to visit some trench, and, consequently, hot and tired as I was from my long tramp, with a heavy pack, and minus food, I went off with him on his errand, which was a pretty long affair. He didn't himself seem to know much of the way about the trenches, but, though this surprised me at the time, I afterwards realised how short a time was sometimes spent in any given "sector," and how a busy Adjutant might well know little about some parts of it. He at any rate seemed to be on good terms with his "lads" as he called them, and a hard-bitten Yorkshire crowd they were.

An Adjutant's duties in stationary warfare such as this, of course, consisted mainly in seeing to the proper organisation of rations, and their supply to Companies; keeping up the repair of trenches in the

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sector which had been destroyed by shell-fire, with the help of the R.E.'s; organising occasional raids, which, at this time, were going somewhat out of fashion; causing fire to be directed on certain spots, for which purpose he had, as a rule, a liaison Gunner Officer at Battalion Headquarters; managing fatigue parties; arranging reliefs; taking all orders and messages from the Brigade, and any neighbouring units; keeping up the War Diary; visiting the outposts; and other matters of less importance.

The night was divided into watches of about three hours apiece, and one of these was taken by the Adjutant. In the case of the York and Lancasters' the M.O. took a watch, and, indeed, he took quite a leading part in the executive duties of Headquarters. A splendid type of man, and invaluable. His services were, it is good to know, well recognised and rewarded.

One night, about ten or eleven p.m., the Adjutant had to visit the outposts. This was the first time during this tour in the line that he had done so, and he took me with him. This inspection could not be done during the day because the space between our trenches and the outposts themselves would naturally be simply swept with small arm fire. The Company who found these outposts had its Headquarters in what was euphemistically called "The Château," but a more unholy château it would be impossible to behold.

We left Battalion Headquarters and traversed several trenches, till we reached a misbegotten looking road which ran straight in the direction of what was once the French town of Bucquoy. Following this for perhaps a quarter of a mile, over ground broken by shell holes at awkward corners, and hastening over the dangerous places, we came to all that was left of a once fine château. A few walls were still standing, but there were large shell craters



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in the garden ; the result of a very heavy shelling that same afternoon. We dived below to the cellars, where we found the Company Commander and his officers, who told us how things were going. We then started in his company to make the round of the outposts.

The first few hundred yards from the château were so pitted with shell holes that the rims of these practically touched one another. A considerable "strafe" of every kind was going on overhead, but just as we arrived at the last dugout before reaching the outposts a wicked rattling began, and an enemy machine-gun sent a string of bullets rushing close over our heads. We thought we must have been spotted, so ran the last hundred yards into the friendly cover of the dugout.

In this dugout was the officer in charge of the outposts, and the Adjutant and I went on with the latter to visit them. As we proceeded the night was lit up with rockets sent up from the German side, and showers of lead passed overhead.

We were now in quite flat country, and presently came to a small trench held by an outpost of a few men. One of them had been wounded that afternoon, and was lying in the trench, but would be taken away when the ration party came up. Rations, of course, could only be brought out to them under the cover of darkness. They reported "all well," and we went on to the next post. Here was a shallow trench, just behind a green thorn-hedge, and in the hedge was a hole large enough to admit the head and shoulders of a man. In the hole lay the lookout of the little post, with his rifle pushed forward, and thirty yards away from the end of that rifle were the Germans.

This was the nearest point on this sector. As a matter of fact we held half Bucquoy, the Germans the other half, and there the line had, at present,

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become stable. This post was not a pleasant one, and its occupant was often wounded. There were some of our men in these posts with the York and Lancasters, also learning their job.

I had certainly not supposed that in the famous French trenches you would find men lying out in such improvised posts. The theory was, no doubt, that they were the sensitive feelers, or antennæ, and that any suggestion of German attack would be felt by them at once. The outermost trenches were themselves but lightly held, and the real stand, if a big attack came, would be on the main line of resistance yet farther back.

The theory was that the outposts might get back to safety, and this was impressed on the men's minds when they were posted; but, in truth, I fear their chances were always very slender.

The remaining two posts were visited without further incident, and we got safely back across the intervening ground to the château. "Well," said the Adjutant, "what do you think of the chances of our outposts if an attack were to come?" I replied, "Not much," and he added, "Non-existent."

Although our own front line was not strongly held the German front line was even more lightly manned, and all the fireworks and other "notions" whizzing in all directions were projected by a comparatively small number of fighting men actually in the front line.

The most heart-shaking sound of all, to my mind, was the discharge from the trench mortar batteries. The terrible crash they made, of an afternoon, when they fell and reverberated over that hideous trench system, struck a note of fiendish despair that turned the French midsummer into an inferno.

Compared with the Gaza trenches these seemed to me rather inferior works of art. The dugouts, which in this part were of German manufacture, were

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good, and gave sufficient room for five wire beds, or shelves, in which it was possible to sleep; though the top man, in one instance, proved too heavy for his wire, and protruded below on to the face of the unfortunate man in the lower berth.

We had some gas shelling of a mild character to the address of our dugout, and I was taught to recognise the peculiarly squashy "plop" which differentiated gas-shell from the common or garden variety. It was a twilight existence, and it mattered little whether it was day or night. Dirt and discomfort were great, but food and drink were good and plentiful.

There was a good deal more "liveliness" on our last day, which was said to be due to foolhardy exposure by certain individuals. A criminal practice for it sacrificed lives to carelessness.

When the Adjutant learned that I was the Assistant Adjutant he strongly recommended me to retain that position, as he said that the Assistant Adjutant's duties in France led him in more peaceful directions than the Adjutant's. It was really not I who should have come up to the trenches but the Adjutant, and that I should have gone to Rear Headquarters at Souâstre to learn my job. The Assistant Adjutant, it appeared, attended to administration, returns, baths, rations, *et hoc genus omne*, while the Adjutant was in the line. He was, in a way, the Staff Captain to the Brigade-Major.

I was sorry to say good-bye to my instructor, who had done all he possibly could to ground me in my duties, though, when our turn came to leave the trenches, we were glad to get away from the dirt and the strafing. We tried to find our way back without guides, and, consequently, after getting out of one trench on to a road we missed our proper exit on the other side, and began to wander down the track, looking vainly for marks which we might recognise.

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We were then in the neighbourhood of "The Crucifix," known as a somewhat "unhealthy" spot, and, in point of fact, were beginning to wander towards the German lines. For all we knew we might be full in view of the latter, on this track, and longed to get into a trench again. At last we spotted what looked like a trench running in the right direction, and took to it, just as some H.E. shell began to burst above us. We had fortunately judged aright, and, with one or two false starts into *culs-de-sac*, came out into the open near Brigade Headquarters, just as a strafe began on that face of the hill. But, before long, we managed to get out of the shell radius, and said good-bye to the enemy's attentions for a spell.

We were only a few days at Amplier when the battalion moved once more into the trenches, and took over the sector already described. I was again sent on to Souâstre, and spent a couple of days with Brigade Rear Headquarters to get *au fait* with my duties, and prepare for the arrival of the battalion. When it came up a Major from a Yorkshire Regiment came with it to assist.

One night, about eleven p.m., I was sent for by the Staff Captain, and told that a party from our transport, which had been sent up with some trench mortar ammunition, had dumped it in the wrong place, and that, unless it was properly delivered to the right hands before dawn, serious consequences might accrue, as it was needed by the battery for a special purpose. I was, therefore, to order our Transport Officer, at once, to take a party up himself, and put things right.

I sent off an orderly to the transport lines, a mile off, with the order, but then decided I had better follow in person to see that it was executed. Our own Transport Officer was away, and another from a Yorkshire Regiment, of great experience, was acting

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for him. When I got to the lines I met the orderly coming away, and found that he had delivered the message to the Transport Officer, who had merely turned over and gone to sleep again. So, had not personal action been taken nothing would have been done.

I roused the defaulter, got the men and animals ready, and saw that the whole lot reported to the Staff Captain.

The Transport Officer seemed to imagine that the job could not be done before dawn, and that the whole party would be blotted out if caught in the daylight. They got up in time, however, and did the job.

This was only one instance of the sudden calls, and nasty jobs, which our transport had continually to undertake, in addition to the ordinary daily routine of taking rations up at night, over shell-swept areas, to the trenches, where the ration parties from the Companies met them. For the enemy knew when rations went up, and always tried to make things as unpleasant as possible at that time. The Transport Officer's experience and cleverness was therefore shown in so dodging the time that the enemy might miscalculate. With the most intelligent anticipation, however, it often meant that the ration party had to cover considerable distances, at the gallop, under hot shell fire. Theirs was no light task, and missed, in addition, the glamour of the firing line. Such service deserved, as a rule, a good deal more recognition than it obtained.

This, the only experience of the battalion in the French trenches, was fortunately not of long duration, for, after only a week "in," we were relieved by a battalion of "The Rifles."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE MARNE

*July 14th, 1918—August 5th, 1918*

“ Oh Valiant hearts who to your glory came  
Through dust of conflict and through battle flame,  
Tranquil you lie, your knightly virtue proved,  
Your memory hallowed in the land you loved.”

—*J. S. Arkwright.*

At this date we went into camp close to the small village of Hénu, and under canvas, in an open field among the woods, we found our lot in every way superior to that in poky billets.

Here we spent three happy weeks, training and “resting,” practising attacks, and trying to master the various cut-and-dried schemes hatched in the light of any one of several, possible events. We might get orders: (1) to march straight to our front; (2) to betake ourselves to lorries, and be moved about in rear of the advance, ready to be thrown in at any required place; (3) to entrain at the nearest station and go to some distant jumping-off ground.

We always seemed to make our important moves on Sundays, and sure enough, on the “usual” day, orders arrived to entrain for an unknown destination. So out we marched, in drenching rain, to Mondicourt, some six miles from camp. A new C.O. was now sent to take command in place of our old C.O., who had gone to England a few hours before, and he

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proved to be the same officer who had been with us at Bucquoy. With his arrival a new era of activity began, which only closed when we finally settled down in Germany.

The summons had come with a vengeance, for, though we knew it not, we were destined to take a leading part in the resounding stroke on the Marne; a stroke which eventually set the whole line in motion, and swept the enemy back to the Rhine.

Our Division was to form a part of Godley's Corps, and assist in driving in the deep Soissons-Château Thierry-Rheims salient which the Generalissimo had selected for the opening act of his drama. Our particular part of the operation was to start from the Forêt de la Montagne de Rheims in an attack on the German flank; this to synchronise with other attacks on his front from the directions of Château Thierry and Soissons respectively. Our attack was directed from the Forêt up the valley of the River Aisne, and in order to threaten the enemy's communications by way of the important Fismes-Chatillon road.

This beautiful valley, with its corn now gold to harvest, was to see one of the bloodiest battles in history.

Our objectives were Chaumouzy, Bligny, and Marfaux, and then others were to take up the attack and press the enemy back till his line again stiffened and held. This time, however, when the attack had got home there was to be no useless battering against an impenetrable wall with the consequent sacrifice in human lives; but another offensive was to start, farther up the great line, and thus the enemy was to be puzzled as to where to throw in his reinforcements in the attempt to save the threatened parts of his line. The initiative, in other words, would pass from him to us. All this

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was, of course, unknown to the actual participants, whose vision could not extend beyond a trench sector which had to be taken, or a village to be stormed at great cost, but now we know why the arduous marches and bloody struggles fitted into the general scheme.

Our Army Commander was to be the comfortable-looking and stout-hearted Berthelôt.

It was a miserable march to Mondicourt, and as dirty a night as the enemy could have wished. Our new Colonel had decided to establish a fifth, or Headquarters' Company, and had put me in command of it as part of my duties. We, therefore, led the way, or what appeared to be the way, though there seemed some reason, more than once, to suppose that we had lost it. In the murk we passed queer-looking sleuth-hounds, which crept along on their bellies and made the horses shy. These were the "whippets," or small tanks, then coming so much into use, which had proved so valuable in supplementing the efforts of the foot soldier. At last we got to Mondicourt, and had to wait, in inches of water, till our turn came to entrain, whilst the sky emptied the vials of its wrath upon us.

But we got off at last, and the next morning found us still creeping onward, we knew not whither. After passing round Paris our pace began to improve, and finally, about one p.m., we reached Sommesous where we detrained, and boarded a fleet of French lorries driven by Senegalese. The Colonel and Adjutant flitted past our convoy in separate, small cars, but the Second-in-Command, when I last saw him, was still at the station.

Hardly had we covered three miles when an aeroplane, which had been circling overhead, suddenly crashed behind a little wood close to the road, and killed its pilot. As far as eye could see lay our dead straight road, without a deviation



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by a single hair's breadth from its knife-edge accuracy.

The beautiful summer evening had begun to draw in when we pulled up by the side of a ripe field of standing corn: and here we came to a long halt, which was finally broken by a car flying our Divisional flag, and coming from our own direction. Being of a retiring nature I decided to withdraw from the centre of the road and take cover behind my lorry, but had barely accomplished the strategic move when, to my consternation, the car pulled up opposite, and the G.S.O.1 it carried inquired, "Is Captain Bacon here?" So there was nothing for it but to step briskly from cover, and salute the General and all the Divisional bigwigs in the car. The G.S.O.1 then inquired whether I was in command, and I replied that, to the best of my belief, I was the senior officer present, as the Colonel and Second-in-Command were I knew not where.

I was thereupon informed that I was to take the battalion on to Athis, a village some three miles down the road, which he pointed out to me on the map. He then wrote out my orders, I saluted, and away went the car.

I now turned to the French Lieutenant who had driven a car at the head of our convoy, and had acted as guide, and ordered him to carry on to Athis. (As a matter of fact he had so far halted or gone on, on some secret understanding of his own.) To my astonishment he refused, and though I flourished my Divisional orders in his face, and told him that it was actually my Divisional General who had just given me the orders in person, he remained unmoved. But supplemented the refusal by declaring that he would first have to get the orders of *his* General before we could proceed.

I then began to realise for the first time the

position in which we stood to the French Command. We were a single unit of one out of only three Divisions lent to them, and the whole scheme was under French direction and co-ordination. The French Lieutenant explained to me that his instructions had become very necessary, as many serious errors had arisen as the outcome of independent action in similar cases.

There was nothing for it then, but to wait, though, to save time, and whilst the French Lieutenant dispatched a car to get his General's orders, I sent on a party of cyclists to Athis to find billets.

Orders eventually arrived for the French Lieutenant to conduct us into Athis, and we were just getting into motion when our Colonel returned. As we started I explained the situation to him, and he was promptly anxious to know what had become of the Second-in-Command, whom he had left with the convoy. Naturally I could not enlighten him, but it subsequently transpired that the officer in question had foregathered with the Adjutant at the rear of the convoy and they had, in consequence, been quite oblivious of the arrival of the General's car, and subsequent events.

We eventually reached Athis to find that the party I had dispatched had procured quarters: but, owing to the issue of a wrong number, my Company and I wandered up and down in the dark for an hour, knocking up all sorts of wrong people. It was now about eleven p.m., so that our transport had to dump itself down in the broad village street, and spend the night there.

During our nocturnal roamings it was amusing to meet another Company Commander, and listen to his very best French opening, as his prospective landlady opened the door; roused, poor woman, from her bed. "*Je suis un officier Anglais. . .*"

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But the people in this part were quite unused to English troops, and were proportionately pleased to welcome, and to do all they could for us.

It was a charming but insanitary village, this Athis, in which we appeared to be going to settle down, as no orders arrived. But that night the Adjutant and I retired unsuspectingly to bed, to be roused from sleep, at one a.m., by orders to march at nine a.m. that day. The business of rousing and informing all the Company Commanders, getting baggage ready, seeing that my own Company got ready too, finishing up matters in the Orderly Room, with the added drawback of visits from inquisitive enemy aeroplanes, and the corollary of doused lights, made this night one of the most nightmarish in all my service.

We had an insufficient number of Headquarters' runners at the time, the consequence being that much had to be done personally, but the battalion passed the Brigade starting point at the correct moment, led by the braves of the Headquarters Company.

The march, thus begun, proved a long and weary one, under a particularly hot sun, with a route which wound through village after village, and out into open country again, with never an idea as to where, or when, it would terminate. It was at this stage that I first learned to appreciate some of our new Colonel's virtues. The men naturally got very fagged, and, in consequence, he did not hurry them, but halted just at the right times, although there was some small risk of losing touch with other units.

At last we came to an extensive wood, near Germaine, where we halted among a lot of felled trees in a clearing; and here the Adjutant and I tried to get some returns, and other office work done, whilst the Colonel rode off with the Company Commanders to reconnoitre the ground beyond

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Courtagnon, where we now learned our attack was to be delivered.

At this stage it may be worth while to give the reader some idea anent this constant office work on active service; work often carried on under the most difficult conditions. The amount of detailed writing, and compilation of returns which require to be done would stagger the civilian. Higher formations have, presumably, to justify their existence, the result being that Adjutants have ceaselessly to decipher orders of all sorts, at every hour of the day or night—the latter for preference—and carry them out, whether it be for a fatigue party; for some return as to the number of men on the strength who have only got one boot lace, or a thousand and one other forms of similar torture.

Any spare moment at the end, or beginning, of a weary march, has to be utilised, and replies written, or orders given, to Company Commanders. The Adjutant's job has never been a sinecure, and modern warfare seems to have gingered it up. Somehow or another the work gets done; the quantities of paper are dealt with, and the necessary orders issued, but there is never a "slack off," and never a time when an Adjutant can sit down and say, "there is an end."

Darkness settled down in that wood at Germaine. The Colonel returned from his reconnoitring expedition, and held a Council of War at which he also detailed those officers to go forward with the battalion, and those to stay at Rear Headquarters. To my surprise I found I was to stay. I had naturally supposed that, as Company Commander of the new Headquarters Company, I should "go in" with the battalion, although the majority of the men in the Company were, from the nature of their duties, required at the wagon lines. The Second-in-Command also remained behind, but he had no

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definite job at Rear Headquarters. I was really, it would seem, to be the working man in respect of personnel and Brigade communication; whilst rations were dealt with by the Transport Officer and the Quartermaster.

When the battalion started forward, that night, Headquarters Company was ordered to stay in the wood at Germaine, and follow next day to Courtagnon with Brigade Rear Headquarters. We were also to help and direct one of our Companies, which had been left behind to entrain the Division at Mondicourt, when it arrived. No Company arrived, however, and at the time stated we marched.

It was a hot July day; the way lay through forests of large oak, and, as if in protest at war and all its horrors, upon either side of our route flitted numbers of Purple Emperor butterflies. But war's realities were there sure enough for, soon afterwards, I and my entire Command were deafened, and nearly knocked down, by the loudest and most metallic sounding discharge I had yet been treated to, and this from an Italian gun firing across the line of march. Half a mile beyond this point we received orders from the Brigade to halt in the wood near Courtagnon; part of the great Forêt de la Montagne de Rheims.

The battalion, at this time, lay up at Courtagnon village, and was just beginning the greatest and perhaps the most successful fight of its existence. For the next six or seven days it held its ground, or advanced, in the valley of the Ardre. For it was at this precise point that the advancing enemy were first checked, and began to roll gradually backward. The 62nd Division had the honour of being one of the three English Divisions to assist in this second battle of the Marne. My own battalion, in this advance itself, took both Marfaux and Bligny; names which General Berthelôt said "should be

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inscribed in letters of gold upon the Regimental Records."

The Company we had left behind joined us in Courtagnon Wood, and, after bivouacking with us for one night, went straight up, was thrown instantly into the fight, and at the moment when the rest of the battalion was almost exhausted. This move proved just sufficient to take Marfaux. So, the lucky accident which had left them behind to entrain the Division proved the factor which gave us the town, and materially helped towards the eventual retreat of the enemy.

But our casualties were terrible, and the roads, down through Courtagnon, soon began to be filled with wounded in process of evacuation. Four or five of our officers fell in the first attack. Men lay wounded and dying in the ripe valley corn, and could not be succoured. Our Medical Officer became so distraught at his inability to find the wounded, whose groans he could hear, that his mind became deranged, and he had to be replaced in the middle of the fight.

The Brigadier went to visit our advanced Battalion Headquarters at Chaumuzay a few days later, and, when close to it, saw the whole village consumed by smoke and shell-fire. He naturally withdrew, saying to himself, as he subsequently told us, "I shall never see any of the Hampshire Headquarters again." But curiously enough, though stormed at by shot and shell, hardly a man had been touched. The house in which they sheltered rocked to its foundations, but never completely collapsed about their ears.

Against our wood at Courtagnon there was some shelling, which fell short of, or beyond, our bivouac, and seemed mostly directed upon the junction of the Courtagnon road with the Rheims-Epernay main road. At night there was usually a perfect maël-

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strom of aircraft and anti-aircraft, with occasional bombing, but our leafy bower remained undiscovered. The place had certainly been well selected for the wagon lines, for it was near enough to get the rations up well, and far enough away for moderate security. Such selection is always a problem, because, if you push up too close, and get your transport knocked out, you render your battalion useless, whilst if you get too far away you give the night ration party an unnecessary journey. Constant communication was, of course, kept up by runners between front and rear Headquarters, and the wants disclosed by the former supplied by the latter.

The 'French transport always filled me with wonder. Instead of the smart, well-groomed horses, and shining saddlery and harness of the English transport, with everything just so, and ready for a General's full dress parade inspection, there went up, each night, the weirdest collection of horses and dowdy-looking transport men. But the result was the same—they got there. The whole outfit to the English eye was unmilitary, but it was in deadly earnest: spit and polish had gone, but the spirit was there still.

I went up one day with the Staff Captain to Brigade advanced Headquarters, established in some catacombs in Courtagnon. The roads, along their length, were pitted with heavy shell-holes, particularly at likely corners, but we did not, ourselves, come in for attention from the enemy. The catacombs are really very fine caves, and, what was more, we enjoyed a good lunch. The Brigade Staff were beautifully housed, and the catacombs made excellent offices for Signallers and Orderly Room clerks. The Brigadier, as usual, was very kind and genial, and told me how well certain of our officers had done in the fighting.

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Our time in the line was now drawing to a close. At great cost we had taken all our objectives, and men who had fought themselves to a standstill had been encouraged by fine leadership even then to make further efforts. In the very first attack our men had gone over the top in the coolest manner, had opened out as though still on parade; and this in the face of the most heartrending losses, with all hell let loose, and a barrage which, through some miscalculation, was so far in advance as to be able to render them little, if any, support. From this terrible start they had stood it out to the finish, and were personally responsible for the capture, as has already been mentioned, of both Bligny and Marfaux.

A few evenings later the battalion, with the entire Brigade "came out." The massed regimental bands gathered outside our bivouac, and, on that lovely July evening, welcomed the battalions as they marched in. It was the only instance of the kind that had so far occurred in all the French fighting, and it was a fine termination to a gallant and strenuous struggle which saw the power of Germany begin to wane. There were thankful hearts in our bivouac that night!

The following day brought me the most strenuous period in all my military life, or, for that matter, in my whole life. I was now Adjutant once more, and for the first time since I had joined Divisional Headquarters in Palestine; and I came to find that an Adjutant, on active service in France, required to be a younger man than I was. For no one has greater need of health, youth and energy.

In these latter stages of the Great War one feels that no Brigadier should have been much more than forty; no Commanding Officer so old; and no Adjutant over thirty. As a case to mark my point



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here was I within a few months of forty, with the duties of Adjutant and Assistant Adjutant to combine. In addition, our trusted Intelligence Officer went on leave, and, at that precise moment, our best Orderly Room clerk was also absent.

And then the work began! First I had to get away in advance of the battalion, meet the Staff Captain on the Epernay road, and mark out a bivouac. He tried to place us in some very thick underwood to escape bombing by night; but it was such a horrible spot that I managed to alter his views. No sooner had the battalion settled down in its bivouac when a battalion parade was ordered. All sorts of water difficulties arose. Orders came for a party to go to the Brigade to see the Corps Commander. Casualty rolls had to be tackled, and orders of all sorts to the Company Commanders attended to.

The meeting with the Corps Commander was, as reported to me, rather amusing. He wished to show his appreciation of our efforts, and two selected officers and two selected N.C.O.'s went from each battalion. But it was then found that a larger audience must be improvised, as the General wished to make a full and formal speech. It was, therefore, necessary to go out into the high-ways and hedges, and beat up an audience composed chiefly of Brigade batmen, cooks, quarter-masters, and other such stout warriors. The General then rose, and thus addressed the meeting, under a spreading forest tree. "You who have watered the valley of the Ardre with your blood," etc.

The best comment was furnished by one of our Sergeants, a fine type of Hampshire man, who had been with us since 1914, and had just won the D.C.M.—"E didn't say nothing about leave." Naturally it was not speeches they wanted, but a

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chance of getting home, after four years' absence, and before grim death overtook them.

That night, whilst writing out orders by candle light for the morrow's march, the Hun began to drop bombs all down the Rheims-Epernay road, and then exploded one well in our neighbourhood. "Well, sir," I said to the Colonel, "am I to finish the orders or put out the candle?" "Put out the candle," he said. And we marched next day without marching orders. At the same place our Brigadier met one of our men being carried in on a stretcher, just after the bombing. The man had actually been to a neighbouring village and had looked long and lovingly upon the wine of the country. I, however, received a request from the Brigade, next day, to render a casualty return for the day in question. My return was an honest "Nil," which I fancy surprised our General, and made him think matters out.

We broke camp early on the following morning, marched off down the road to Epernay, covering about ten miles. Our way lay through that pleasant country the heart of the Champagne district; vineyards covered all the land, the sun shone, and all was right with the world.

About half-way we learned that we were shortly to march past General Berthelôt, who had been mainly responsible for the rolling back of the enemy in this sector of the front. The Colonel, as usual, rose to the occasion by halting us for a breather about a quarter of a mile from the actual saluting point. We did not, therefore, go by jaded, and moreover timed our restart to just reach our place in the column, so that, as we passed the stout, good-hearted-looking Berthelôt, the battalion was marching splendidly.

The outcome of this little piece of tactics brought a statement from Berthelôt that the

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Hampshires were the battalion that marched best out of the whole of the two Divisions that went past him. And yet these men, who had looked so smart, had only come, the day before, out of the very jaws of death. They had also left nearly two hundred of their comrades behind.

Chouilly proved a cheery, small town, with good billets, but the Brigade had taken our Headquarters billet, and we had, in consequence, to find another. The "elsewhere" proved to be a good shot, however, with a plentiful supply of delicious, cool champagne. After our hot march it was nectar! The troops were soon welcomed by the inhabitants, and treated to the best their cellars could produce, with the inevitable result on men who had been fasting and abstaining through a most trying period.

Very soon I got a message from the Brigade that discipline must be tightened up, "as the Brigadier had noticed, etc."; and then came the news that a Corporal had struck a French officer, with the consequence that we had to put him under arrest and arrange for his court martial. Soon after this incident the Staff Captain came to see us, and as he passed our Headquarters' sentry, the latter was suddenly attacked and overpowered by one of our men, who had imbibed too freely, and the two began rolling about in the gutter. The Staff Captain did not immediately tumble to the true reason for this display of pugnacity, and there was some difficulty in getting him away from the scene of action before worse befell. These ebullitions of spirits, however, soon passed off, and we settled down for three days' real rest.

The day before the battalion left Chouilly, the old Frenchman in whose house my Orderly Room was situated—a nice old place in the main street—came and invited me "to drink wine with him." I replied that I should be delighted, and inquired the

time that would best suit him. He replied, "My time is Monsieur's time." I suggested five p.m. that day, when I hoped the cases of the Orderly Room would be over. At five p.m., therefore, I was invited into the old gentleman's room, where he and his wife had spread out a quantity of slender-stalked wine glasses, on a fair lawn tablecloth. We sat down and drank each other's health, and then in came our finest Company Commander to see me, and was pressed to join us. Soon afterwards a young subaltern arrived, and he too had to sit down.

The kind old couple then continued to fill and refill our glasses with a beautiful dry champagne, until the subaltern implored them to desist. We carried on conversation with difficulty, as none of us had more than a few words of French, and they had no English. But the whole incident was so spontaneous and friendly that it stands out prominently in the memory.

The morning on which we left Chouilly was signalised by a parade, at which it was my duty to promulgate the sentence of the court martial on the unfortunate Corporal who had struck the French officer. He merely had his stripes struck off, as the Frenchman had expressed his anxiety that as little notice as possible might be taken of the incident.

A short march to the station, a weary wait, and then we bade farewell to the Marne and travelled north once more.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE ATTACK ON VAUX-VRAUCOURT

*August 5th, 1918—September 4th, 1918*

“ Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the  
Lord,

He is trampling out the winepress where the grapes of  
wrath are stored.”

—*H. B. Stowe.*

AFTER detraining at Doullens there followed a long march to the village of St Leger-les-Authies, and we eventually settled down in moderate comfort, though the billets were so small that the Intelligence Officer, Signalling Officer and myself were obliged to share a room about the size of an average bath room.

The wooded, well watered, and steeply undulating country round St Leger was in a good state of cultivation, with the corn in stook under warm weather, and war only in the distance. So here we trained hard, and were for three weeks very busy pulling things together.

A draft of two hundred men had joined us on the Marne, and they had to be fitted into their places, armed, and drilled in their new Companies. Bombing, and firing on the range, filled up any intervals, and, in the afternoon, inter-Company cricket reared its infrequent head.

One of our longest range guns had its lair just behind the village, and was run up on a small rail-

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way to this; here it blazed off two or three times a day at some distant objective. When it fired the windows shook, the houses reeled, and all men held their breath. After this had been going on for a week or more it took to itself wings, and went off to make a nuisance of itself on another sector of the front. The shift was made, seemingly, that the enemy might not succeed in locating it, and so be likely to try reprisals. To the infantryman this always seems a cowardly sort of proceeding. The gun does him no sort of good, and, when it has attracted attention to itself, clears out and leaves a legacy of "hate" behind.

The Divisional General, Sir Walter Braithwaite, came one day to inspect our new draft of men, and we had so little notice, that, within half an hour of his arrival, it was my duty to search about for an improvised parade ground, and guide the scattered Companies to it. Hardly were the men on parade, and the Colonel giving them a little "manual," when the Divisional party were descried climbing across a potato patch fence in all the glory of red and gold.

And a most unconventional war time inspection it was; but the General proved to be pleased and genial, and, as he left, approved of our suggestion to retain our regimental patches, black and yellow, on our tunics, in addition to the Divisional yellow shoulder patch. This had been a vexed question, for we had worn these in Palestine, and had been told that we ought to remove them in order to make ourselves uniform with the rest of the Division.

Our Brigadier's methods pleased us all a few days later, for a party of our N.C.O.'s were applying for commissions, and, as soon as he saw them, he passed the lot as approved. He had, it appeared, already formed a good opinion of our men, which nothing subsequently shook. He then turned to me and said, "Now then, Bacon, how about those

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rations yesterday? Whose fault was it that they were delivered so late?" The question arose through our having been detailed to deliver rations, for parties of men from several battalions, at a spot some four or five miles distant, and at a certain hour in the morning. In the press of business I had misread the hour, with the result that the rations had been delivered several hours late, and complaints had been sent in. "It was my fault, sir," I said, and was proceeding to explain when he cut me short with, "Oh, that's all right. You pitch into somebody about it." A method of treatment, I submit, which will get the utmost service out of a man.

One more incident will show the man he was. I had rather gathered from some injudicious person that both the Brigadier and Commanding Officer had needlessly sacrificed our men's lives on the Marne for their greater glory. The C.O. told me, confidentially, one day that the Brigadier had been asked whether his Brigade was now sufficiently recovered to be thrown, once more, into a great attack which was preparing in the sector immediately behind that in which we were then "at rest." Instead of adopting the "ready to the last gaiter button" answer, which would doubtless have redounded to his own great advantage, he replied that he thought his Brigade was at present too shaken for any further great enterprise in the immediate future. "That," said the Colonel, "is the right kind of man to have for a Brigadier," and I thought to myself, "Well, if those are your own views, you, too, have not much of the butcher in you either."

A few days later orders came to march across country, by night, to join the 6th Corps at Warluzel. This was the result of the Brigadier's recent action, and because it was judged that, in the general advance about to take place, the hardest fighting would occur immediately in front of our present

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sector—that of the 4th Corps. We were relieved, therefore, on the afternoon of August 24th, 1918, by a New Zealand battalion, and the young New Zealand officer to whom I handed our billets over proved one of the finest specimens of young manhood I had yet met.

That night we assembled our scattered Companies in the main street of St Leger, and, as the whole Brigade was marching together, the narrow streets were congested with guns, transport and men, the consequence being that, in the darkness, it was difficult to retain our place in the Brigade Column.

There seemed no end to the marching that night, and at one time we much doubted whether the Brigade guides were taking us aright. Our band played merrily, without their manuscript music, to cheer us on the way, and we did arrive at last, by leafy country lanes, at the little village of Warluzel, or “Mangelwurzels,” as the men called it.

This little spot was right in the backwash of the war, thoroughly agricultural and peaceful, and we only hoped that we might remain there for at least a week. But on the second day we again got marching orders.

Enormous quantities of bombs and ammunition now arrived, most of which we were quite unable to transport, and, on the second day of our stay, the Colonel went sick. As we had to march back again, by night, to Thièvres, and over practically the same route by which we had come, he decided to go by lorry.

Next day I had a very busy Orderly Room, and a long visit to the Companies, who were spread out in a large field, with a wood on one side, and a river on the other. Whilst at Thièvres the Colonel assembled all officers, and planned an exercise in wood-fighting for the morrow, in which I was cast for the post of Commander of a skeleton force, which



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the Companies were to attack. But our "pow-wow" was rudely interrupted by orders to march again that very night, and back close to Warluzel; actually to Saulty.

Hurried preparations had once more to be made; and to the uninitiated, who may imagine that the word has only to go forth that, "The battalion will march at seven p.m. to-night," it will be well to explain that such a move involves a lot of work in the orderly billet, dugout, or tent, as the case may be. The sending-off of advance parties to the place to which the battalion is marching; arranging for meals to be taken in time; for rations to be sent to the right place; for men to be left to guard dumps of unnecessary baggage; for settlement of billeting documents, and handing over of billets; for any number of queries from Company Commanders as to men who cannot march, and must go to hospital, or men due for leave. An Adjutant's own personal as well as office arrangements must also be so complete that all shall pass the starting point at the correct moment. The Adjutant's life is "not a happy one." Perhaps, too, this period, with its constant marching and counter-marching, was the most trying portion of all that trying time our battalion underwent in the great advance.

But we got away again without hitch, and we had the Colonel recovered and with us again. So we arrived back again in the 6th Corps area, after only one night with our old 4th Corps. Our wanderings thus showed that in four successive nights we had been: (1) with the 4th Corps; (2) with the 6th Corps; (3) with the 4th Corps; (4) with the 6th Corps.

The Colonel and I billeted in adjacent rooms at Saulty, and well was it we did so, for every hour or so fresh orders kept coming in from the Brigade relative to a start next day, and I for one was

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up most of the night sending out orders to the Companies. Again we left behind baggage, and were now reduced to the minimum.

But we marched only a short distance, and were then embarked with the whole 62nd Division in a fleet of lorries. The pace was brisk, bringing us every moment nearer to the front with its shell-shattered ruins. Places which, a day or two before, and many weary months before that, would have been far too unhealthy to visit, except on one's stomach. Now we boldly rode in lorries, a Division at a time.

By midday we had halted, and a bivouac ground had to be found for the night. This resolved itself into as uncompromising a bit of shell-poisoned waste as fancy could picture, with one rough trench about knee high. The ground selected, I rode back, passing what seemed like the whole of the British Army, horse, foot, and artillery. The advance had begun in earnest.

The road to the front became so congested that I could, with difficulty, urge my horse against the stream. From time to time a few shells came over, which my horse strongly objected to, and it was quite remarkable to discover how infallibly he distinguished between our own gun-fire and that of the enemy. A loud report from our guns would not cause a flicker of an eyelid, but a far-off, wicked, little flash from an enemy gun, and he would start and shiver.

I eventually discovered the battalion halted by the wayside, and in despair of ever getting forward. But there came, at length, a gap in the never-ceasing flow, which we got into, marched on to our bivouac, and settled down, just after dark, as best we might. But there was to be no rest that night, for, only a little later, we got orders to move over to rising ground, some three quarters of a mile away.

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This, too, was accomplished in the dark, and the C.O. had just sent off a man to procure a stretcher for me to lie on, when the Brigade Intelligence Officer looked down into our trench, and remarked, "I am very sorry, Colonel, but you have got to move again to-night, and the Brigadier wishes to see you at a point about half a mile from Courcelles."

This point lay about two miles farther on, so the C.O. left me, with orders to bring the battalion on to Courcelles as soon as I could collect it, and to meet him just outside at a certain hour. The meeting place was difficult to fix without previous knowledge, but we both hoped that the map was correct.

So the battalion started out once more into the night, and, after traversing something a little better than a bridle track, we got to a "pukka" road leading to Courcelles, and on the outskirts of that ruined village, looking ghostly in the moonlight, we halted and awaited the coming of the Colonel.

To my great relief he joined us after a lengthy wait, and we marched again, with himself well ahead to reconnoitre the ground, for we had orders to take up a position on rising ground two miles away, near the railway. We were sent in support of a battalion now holding the most advanced position in this portion of our line, with an enemy counter-attack expected at any moment.

I was left again to bring on the battalion, and we footed it so merrily downhill that we arrived almost upon the heels of the Colonel. A shell or two had burst close to the road, and he had had a narrow squeak.

Here, in a dugout cut out of the railway embankment, we set up Battalion Headquarters, sharing it with a Yorkshire battalion, the Companies being posted on slightly rising ground in front of the railway.

We were now within half a mile of what had once been Achiet-le-Grand, and the most advanced British troops were near the small village of Behagnies, from two to three miles farther east.

The next day, a Sunday, we prowled about the dugouts on the line, which were packed with German rifles, anti-tank guns, pickelhaube, stick-rockets, and accoutrements of all sorts, hastily thrown away in their withdrawal on the previous day. Such a collection verified the supposition that we were indeed on the enemy's heels.

We learned that we should not have to move that day, at any rate, although it seemed probable that the Yorkshire battalion would move up to support their sister battalion at Behagnies that night. Towards evening I made the round of the various Companies, to find their exact positions and headquarters, and found them all cheery and carefully posted. This round took a couple of hours, and during the last half-hour of it a heavy "strafe" commenced.

A regular barrage began to creep down the hill towards our railway line. I caught sight of some of our gunners, who were withdrawing to fresh positions, coming over the top of the hill, and, as the shelling became more intense, quickening their pace, till, finally, they came tearing down towards us, pursued by shells which were now bursting in their midst. The barrage crept on till it reached the railway, and the whole affair looked like the prelude to a grand, enemy counter-attack.

About eight p.m. hasty orders came from the Brigade that our battalion was to march in two hours' time, and attack at dawn. Also that the Colonel was to repair immediately to Brigade Headquarters for detailed orders. He, therefore, started for the Brigade, leaving me to collect the scattered Companies ready for a start, and to summon the

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Company Commanders for a conference on his return.

It should be mentioned that the Second-in-Command was away on leave, and we were, in consequence, very short handed. Only three Companies and their Commanders had been collected by the time the C.O. returned; this owing to the fourth Company's change of dugouts in accordance with Brigade orders, and inability to let us know its whereabouts in time; but he explained his plan of attack to the officers present, with the rain pouring into the dugout, and obliterating the map.

So we pushed off with three Companies, reached the "place of assembly," the missing Company joined us, and final plans were elaborated.

The C.O. went forward with the Intelligence Officer, and led the battalion to the jumping-off place for the attack. But it was with great difficulty that he found it, for the battalion which was supposed to be there was nowhere to be discovered. Owing, however, to a previous knowledge of the ground he had sited the objective correctly, and the attack, in spite of gas and heavy enemy fire, was completely successful. All objectives were gained.

This attack was launched just as dawn broke, in a bitterly cold rain, and was supported by what seemed to be a very feeble barrage. The enemy were probably surprised in the rain and dark, and were therefore too much hustled to stick it out.

Our losses were heavy, and amongst them one of our youngest and best Company Commanders.

The bank on which I was posted was a perfect mass of recent shell holes, and here the Colonel joined me about midday to fix up our communications.

As soon as Headquarters were installed the Brigade-Major rang me up, and expressed the Brigade's congratulations upon our success. We ascertained later that the Brigadier had never

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anticipated that we should even find our way to the jumping-off ground, far less deliver a successful attack at such short notice, and had it not been for the C.O.'s local knowledge the whole operation must have miscarried.

We had now to hang on to what we had gained. The C.O. was dissatisfied at our distance from the Companies, and, at about two p.m., we started forward to establish Headquarters, if in any way possible, in a sunken road, just behind the ground the Companies had gained. It was a risk, but he was determined to be well up.

At one point I caught sight of a bright rolling object, and did not, for the moment, realise its nature, then discovered it to be a "dud" shell just finishing its career of supposed usefulness.

The sunken road proved to be rather shallow, but fairly wide, with a row of shanties on either side, which were anything but shell proof. The C.O., however, decided to send for the Signallers, and to bring up Headquarters to this road. Whether the enemy actually saw our men moving doesn't matter, for they certainly tumbled quickly to the fact that it was occupied, and soon got our range, with the result that, instead of chance shells, we were quickly treated to concentrated fire. The C.O., Intelligence Officer, and I were sheltering in one shanty when so many shells burst close by that we decided to transfer ourselves to another, and this we did one at a time.

The Brigade-Major then rang up, and I had to nip across to the telephone hut leaving the C.O. behind. The Brigade-Major wanted to know how we were getting on, and I told him that, as a fact, we were at that moment being heavily shelled.

When I got back the C.O. had disappeared, to be eventually found in another shanty, where we managed to have tea. A few minutes later we had

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just left the tea hut in time to give a miss to a shell which came through the roof, and burst among the tea things.

It was just at this moment that one of our airmen crashed close by, and ran into the sunken road for shelter. He was a useful visitor for he said that he knew of a big German dugout only some three or four hundred yards away; an ideal place for Battalion Headquarters, and infinitely safer than our present abode. The only difficulty was transit without damage, for the enemy, knowing all about it, and no doubt anticipating such a move, were simply plastering the entrance with shell fire. The C.O. then asked him to take the Intelligence Officer to reconnoitre its possibilities, which he did, and returned to report a "perfect palace," with no less than forty or fifty berths in it, which would amply accommodate all Headquarters—and a few dead Boches which could be removed, plus a good many dead horses which could not.

Our move was managed successfully after dark, the whole of Headquarters being got there without the loss of a man. Our airman left us that night, but showed his gratitude for hospitality, two days later, by returning to the spot in a new aeroplane, hovering over our men in the front line, and dropping packets of cigarettes.

Gas alarms were frequent that night, and I shall not forget the few moments when that most deadly of all gases, phosgene, came creeping down the dugout-shaft and I could find my gas-mask nowhere. Nor shall I forget my relief following the C.O.'s smart drive at my chest to wake me to the fact that I was wearing it in the "alert" position all the time. Want of sleep, plus a determination not to be caught napping, as upon a former occasion, is my excuse.

Upon the following day we ran out of candles

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and had to live in Stygian blackness, and it was at this stage that the Brigade now informed us that we had not gone sufficiently forward, and that the battalion next on our left complained they were ahead of us, and wanted us to get forward and support them. They also maintained that there was no enemy in front of us. We replied that this was not the case, and that our Companies could plainly see a regular nest of machine-guns up the line of a fence, just ahead. It appeared, however, that the other battalion must be supported, and we arranged to move forward and try and carry a German post called "The Horse Lines."

"A" Company was to undertake this, but most unfortunately its best subaltern had been wounded in the hand, and had come down to Headquarters the day before. He protested that he was quite able to carry on, but the M.O. thought otherwise, and on the following day he was so bad that even he realised the position. He was eventually evacuated, and we never saw him again.

The attack on "The Horse Lines" turned out a complete success, but with several casualties. We also cleared up the situation and discovered that our diagnosis had been perfectly correct, i.e., that the enemy was precisely where we had reported him to be. The battalion popularly supposed to be ahead of us proved, in fact, to be a long way behind, and quite out of their bearings. It was we, therefore, who were now well "in the air."

Upon the following day an S.O.S. message from a Company Commander came through, but the men stuck grimly to their job, and, a little later, the tension relaxed considerably.

We now learned that we should shortly be relieved by one of the Yorkshire battalions, which would come through our position to make a further attack. This was meant to clear the enemy out of



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Vaux-Vraucourt, up to the outskirts of which our advance had brought the line.

On the next night all Companies duly reported relief by one a.m., with the exception of "A" Company. The C.O. and Adjutant of the relieving battalion had by this time joined us in our dugout. They said they were sure that their "A" Company had taken over all right from ours, but there was still that unfortunate doubt. Finally I went up with two runners to "A" Company Headquarters to make sure. The trouble was that, if unrelieved, our Company would stay where they were, and catch the full force of the German barrage, which would inevitably shut down on that particular area as soon as our attack took place, and "A" Company would be wiped out!

The distance there and back had to be covered in an hour, or we also should be obliterated: so amidst a hail of shell, and mostly at the double, we reached our objective, to find the Commander of "A" Company of the Yorkshires safely installed, and all well!

In spite of a further shell accompaniment we got safely back to Headquarters dugout, where the C.O. was awaiting us. This special attention from the German gunners was doubtless due to a premonition that our fresh attack was impending.

Battalion Headquarters now moved back a couple of miles, to Behagnies, and soon after we had got there dawn began to break. We could now hear the start of a steady rumble; our barrage, behind which the first attack was being launched. "Let us go and watch it," said the Colonel. So from rising ground we stood and watched fire belched from hundreds of our guns. The sky was lit up, and the earth reverberated with the clangour. It was a truly magnificent sight, and gave, for the first time, confidence that we had now got the enemy on the

## WANDERINGS OF A TEMPORARY WARRIOR

run. This weight of metal spoke of organisation and irresistible gun-power.

After being moved up "in support" yet again on the next day, and after some orders and counter-orders, we got the glad intelligence that the battalion was to come right out, and to go back for a rest to our old railway cutting near Achiet.

This was safely accomplished, and our turn in the line was over. We were now due for a rest of, we hoped, some considerable duration.

Our casualties during these six days had been:

Killed.		Wounded.		Missing
Officers.	Other Ranks.	Officers.	Other Ranks.	
1	19	2	121	2

The battalion had done all that it had been called on to do. In all its French fighting it had some six periods of attack, ranging from four to ten days each in duration. Its casualties in the Vaux operations were the third highest, and the difficulties it encountered were, in some respects, as great as any in the whole series.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE ATTACK ON THE HINDENBURG LINE

*September 4th, 1918—October 5th, 1918*

“ Shot down in skirmish, or disastrous rout  
Of battle, when the loud artillery drave  
Its iron wedges through the ranks of brave  
And doomed battalions . . . storming the redoubt.”  
—*Longfellow.*

WE remained in our railway cutting for little more than a week, and during this short respite there was an immense amount of work to be done. Casualties amounting to one hundred and fifty, following so quickly upon those of two hundred, involved a great deal of re-organisation. Lewis gun sections had been almost swept away, and had to be hastily made up again. A battalion returning such heavy casualties would, under the old rules, have probably had three months' complete rest well out of the firing line. We learned, however, that we were to be thrown in again in a few days.

The Adjutant of the neighbouring Yorkshire battalion, who had been in France for the last two years, told me that never before, in their starkest times, had such things been. He was gloomy about it, too, opining that there could be but one result, namely, that each attack, under such conditions, would become less vigorous, till, finally, a failure occurred. It was at any rate obvious that, whatever Foch's new recipe for beating the Hun might be,

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there was no intention of sparing the men now at the front.

A Divisional Parade was now ordered, and we marched past our new General, Sir R. D. Whigham (successor to Sir W. Braithwaite, who had got a Corps) and at this I officiated as Adjutant for the last time.

A day or two later we started up the line once more, marching to Havrincourt Wood, with orders to attack Havrincourt itself. This order actually meant an attack on the "Hindenburg" line. So it appeared that a battalion which, in a month, had lost three hundred and fifty men was to be thrown against this, supposedly, impregnable position.

The "barrage" map for this projected attack was as complicated as Hampton Court Maze, and it seemed, too, that one of our Companies would hardly fail to be caught by our own guns.

We, however, marched towards nightfall, and arrived at ruined Bapaume; which had been re-taken, following the capture of Vaux, during our week of "rest," and a few walls were all that remained.

There we had a meal, and, on starting again, our Rear Headquarters' advance party met us, to guide us to Ruyaulcourt, where we were to bivouac, while the battalion marched on to Havrincourt Wood. The party also supplied us with the uncomfortable information that the place chosen was too far forward, and that it had been under enemy shell fire all day.

Sleet showers, and later a heavy fog, dropped on us whilst wandering up a bridle track interrupted by quagmires; but the guide stuck to it that he was right, and at last, near a clump of bushes, on a kind of open down, he announced that we had arrived.

It was a singularly "blasted heath" on which this damp and miserable night had descended.

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The Quartermaster had been lost, and the Transport Officer had gone on with the battalion to Havrincourt Wood. There appeared to be one solitary trench, in stiffish clay, that represented little more than a crack in the ground, and into this we crept. I shared a small hole with my Orderly Room Sergeant, and a Company Sergeant-Major, an old regular of six feet four inches or thereabouts. By lying close together we managed to keep fairly warm, but there was no chance of even an extra ground-sheet to cover us from the rain that night.

Daylight showed us that we were within view of Bourslon Wood, in which the German look-out posts were stationed, and it was evident that if we moved about much we should be shelled out of our lair. Of cover there was very little, but we managed to dig out the trench a bit, and cover it with bits of corrugated iron and earth. The Quartermaster then turned up, having spent the entire night in a vain attempt to track us down; and, a little later, the Transport Officer and I discovered a German dump of deadly looking aeroplane bombs.

On our second day of residence we must have been spotted for a few shells landed close to our transport animals, and these had to be shifted, only to be shelled again. Our French interpreter was so demoralised by the shelling that he made hasty tracks in full view to Brigade Rear Headquarters.

Heavy news now came down to us. The battalion had once more suffered terrible casualties; it was thought even heavier than on the Marne. Its attack had been very successful, and Havrincourt had been captured, but at great cost. This sounded rather like the end of the battalion.

It had moved forward at one a.m., on September 12th, to the assembly positions in the open country between Havrincourt Wood and the Canal du Nord, and, at six a.m., commenced the attack on the

village. Owing to the formidable nature of the defences a frontal attack was out of the question, so the village had to be approached from the left and then a swing made to the right. At seven a.m. shells were still falling from our own barrage and that of the enemy, and one Company which had reached the Square incurred heavy casualties. Another Company took the château, several prisoners and machine-guns falling into their hands.

About eight-thirty the barrage lifted and enabled three Companies to advance through the village and "mop up" the Huns hiding in cellars and dugouts.

The fourth Company lost all its officers, but was successfully rallied by an officer transferred from another Company, and brought up to reinforce the rest of the battalion holding the railway line east of the village.

The enemy then delivered a heavy counter-attack which was successfully repulsed, and a message came through from the Corps Commander, "Well done, Hants." The key of this part of the Hindenburg line had been taken and successfully held.

One night a call came from a Sapper officer, who begged us to find a fatigue party to help bridge a neighbouring trench, at which the transport of relieving troops would otherwise be stuck. Every man we had was hard put to it guarding prisoners, running messages, preparing bombs, cooking food, or transporting rations to the battalion; but he got his fatigue party, and the road was made in the nick of time by the light of flares.

Five or six days of this and we learned that the battalion was coming out, and that we were to precede it to Beugny, where the night was to be spent. The previous night had been rendered hideous by enemy aeroplanes and our anti-aircraft guns, and, indeed, all through the day the enemy's airmen had

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been busy. One, greatly daring, came over in broad daylight, set fire to one of the look-out "sausages" poised above our trench, then proceeded to do the same for the next in the line, and finally flew away scathless. The Hun seemed to be getting very active and bold in this respect, and it was surprising in view of the constant success of our attacks.

Rear Headquarters marched some four miles into Beugny, and, just as it entered the town, there came a bombing alarm, when all lights went out: the consequence being that it took us some time to find the spot, consisting of a collection of huts and dugouts, allotted us as a bivouac.

I had only just taken my stand with the Quartermaster, outside one of the huts, when I heard a bomb explode close by, and was wondering whether some better shelter could not be found, when there suddenly sailed out of the sky, immediately above us, a gigantic Hun battle-plane. The monster seemed to become stationary immediately above the hut, and looked as though in the act of dropping a bomb. We stared at it, fascinated, expecting every moment to be engulfed in overwhelming ruin.

Our searchlights had now begun to play upon it from all quarters, and it stood out against the black sky, with every detail showing in bold relief. As we stood gaping there suddenly shot out into the illuminated arc a little aeroplane; the merest pygmy beside this Leviathan. A David against a Goliath. The pygmy darted right behind the monster, and, in a second, had discharged a string of tracer bullets into it. Immediately, the whole machine caught fire, flared up, began to rock dizzily, and then rushed headlong to earth.

We thought it must pitch right upon us, and cowered behind a hedge. But no, it swept, a flaming mass, and crashed to ground nearly four hundred yards away. After a short interval a mighty explo-

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sion occurred, which shook the ground and shattered hearing for a time. The undischarged bombs had, for some reason unconnected with the actual smash, gone off as one in a thunderous roar.

An examination of the wreckage showed that seven Huns had gone to their account. But unfortunately a party of our men, who had commenced to gather round, were blown in all directions; so that, in its dying throes, the monster had fulfilled a part of its fell purpose by causing seventeen British casualties. A French interpreter, attached to our Brigade Headquarters, was leaning over the machine in an attempt to loot the chronometer when the explosion occurred, and had the seat of his trousers blown clean away, but, marvellous to chronicle, was otherwise unharmed.

This was one of the monster enemy planes, carrying bombs of, it is thought, a ton in weight. We were in any case well quit of the brute, and spent a quiet night in consequence. All power to that English airman's elbow, may he reach a green and hearty old age!

From Beugny we marched, next day, back to our old railway cutting at Achiet-le-Grand. But where we had gone out from Achiet in Companies we now returned little better than platoons, and it seemed impossible to call this collection of survivors of Havrincourt a battalion. It had, however, once more done all, and more than all, that had been asked of it. Our casualties were:

Killed.		Wounded.		Missing.
Officers.	Other Ranks.	Officers.	Other Ranks.	O.R.
1	37	7	207	38 = 290

and surely it must be that now a rest would be granted, for, in the three actions taking place from July to September, our casualties had totalled seven hundred and eighty-eight.



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In the course of the next week we were joined at Achiet by fresh home drafts, and no less than thirteen new officers. It looked, therefore, and after all, as though a move was being made to revivify our skeleton cadres for "sending in" again. Foch, it seemed, had his plan, but it looked like a plan which spelt death or disablement to seven men out of every ten, whatever their luck. This did not seem to worry the men, however; for despite their experiences, and in the intervals between other games, they must needs get hold of German stick-bombs and explode them as a pastime!

In little more than a week orders came for an attack on the canal by Marcoing, just beyond Havrincourt. The Hun was sticking hard, and would not be dislodged without further efforts. So up we went once more, and spent the first night at Bengnâtre. From here I was sent forward, with a party of N.C.O.'s, to find our next night's bivouac, which was to be somewhere in the Beaumetz-le-Cambrai district.

Just beyond Beaumetz, in a sunken road, I met the Staff Captain, and beyond this point care had to be used, for not more than two or three could proceed at a time, by day, owing to enemy fire. The Staff Captain then directed me to find a "Heavy" Battery Headquarters somewhere in a distant fold of the ground, and ascertain the best available quarters for the battalion. The Battery was eventually unearthed, and I was greeted with great good will by the Gunner Officers, who were, however, dubious about moving out themselves that night. They had also heard that every infantry soldier in France was going "over the top" on the following morning, and prayed that it might not rain too hard, for, if so, the guns would be mud-logged, and unable to move to support the infantry.

Armageddon was evidently set. A last great

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push was about to be called for to free France from Hohenzollern shackles. In any case I was given an excellent lunch, to an orchestra of their guns, and a last piece of advice that, "You must not show a light at night or you will be shelled out of it."

Here I found a few dugouts and trenches, but poor accommodation for a whole battalion, and started back with my N.C.O.'s, after dividing out such accommodation as there was between the various Companies.

No sooner had we reached Beaumetz than orders came to go back, another two miles, to a certain road near railhead, to meet the battalion marching up from Bengnâtre, and guide it to the night's bivouac.

This was, of course, all in the day's work, but we had ourselves first to memorise the route in the dusk, and actually almost failed to find the rendez-vous. At about ten p.m. the Brigade-Major turned up, and, soon after, the battalion.

So, greatly daring, I proceeded to act as guide by the ill-defined track along which I had come, and, by good fortune, made never a mistake.

The need for no lights raised difficulties for our "cookers," which the C.O. had hoped to get up, in order to give the men a hot meal before "going over" on the following morning. The decision was left with me as I had seen the ground, and, in the end, the "cookers" were got right up without attracting unwelcome attention.

We were here practically surrounded by barbed wire entanglements, and our Intelligence Officer had been detailed to lead the battalion out of the bivouac. A few minutes before this was to occur he informed me that he had had no time yesterday to study the terrain and knew not how to start. By great good fortune, after a rapid race round, we found the gap, and the battalion marched through to the tick.

As we rode back to Rear Headquarters, four or

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five miles to the rear, the great barrage commenced, and we had hardly gone a mile before we passed down a narrow road, stiff with guns hard at work.

The next few days passed in a kind of nightmare with an ever-shifting locale. From the moment Rear Headquarters limbered up it became one long succession of small uncomfortable happenings. Havrincourt Wood, where we lived for forty-eight hours like rabbits in a small tarpaulin-covered trench; Corduroy tracks; dead horses—these to the address of aeroplane bombs; blasted, bomb-smitten, unhealthy country; and then to ground once more in the moat of Havrincourt Château.

But our battalion had taken Marcoing, despite again sustaining heavy casualties; and at the expense, too, of Cottam, our finest Company Commander. Cottam had told me at Achiet, on his return from leave only the week before, that the best he could now hope for was to be wounded and get home. I fear he had had a strong presentiment of his end. Little presentiment was needed, however, at this stage in the fighting, for the chances of a Company, or Platoon Commander, were of the slightest.

How little we knew at that moment that we were actually through the worst of it, and that better days were dawning at last.

A Yorkshire battalion had been designated to attack Marcoing, but had been unable to reach the assembly position in time, and at the last moment the Hampshires had been ordered to take their place. In consequence, they started over a mile behind the "barrage," a very severe handicap in any attack! The two leading Companies advanced on the trenches west of the village; the right-hand Company captured an enemy battery and its horses which were being rushed up, as well as machine-guns and trench mortars, after some sharp fighting;

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whilst the left-hand Company took a field gun and several prisoners, and consolidated on its objective. The enemy being by that time driven from the west of the village the remaining two Companies "leap-frogged" through, and succeeded in establishing posts on the farther bank of the canal, in the teeth of heavy machine-gun fire.

On the following days there was further heavy fighting across the canal, and, finally, on October 1st, the whole Division was slightly withdrawn to enable a fresh Division to come through to the attack.

The battalion's captures at Marcoing included four field guns, forty-six machine-guns, ten trench mortars and over one hundred prisoners.

A bivouac for the remnants of the battalion had now to be found somewhere in the Hindenburg line, where it was to "rest." This was hard to find until I stumbled upon the dugouts of the famous line itself, with their twenty entrance steps. The battalion arrived almost upon the tail of the find, and it was whilst here that we recovered Cottam's body, and buried him, with N.C.O.'s as pall-bearers, in a grave which he shared with many good men of every rank.

## CHAPTER XV

FROM CAMBRAI TO MAUBEUGE

*October 5th, 1918—November 11th, 1918*

“ And there was a great calm.”

THE C.O. was now to go on leave, and it occurred to me that I was the next officer due for the same thing, and mentioned the fact to him. He did not, at first, rise to the “ fly,” but a day later remarked, “ You had better arrange to get your leave from the Brigade with me, we can then go together.” So it was finally fixed up, and a day later saw us riding across country for the main Cambrai-Bapaume road.

Just as we reached this a Field Service car flashed past, and, our shouts being in vain, we rode in pursuit, with the lucky result that we just managed to stop it before the driver got beyond ear-shot. Handing the horses to our grooms, we boarded the car, and were borne swiftly along to Achiet—which held for us so many memories. We also found that it was going even unto Doullens, and thither we went rejoicing.

On our way we passed over the Somme battlefield, that scene of, perhaps, the bloodiest fighting in the whole war; and never have I seen a more terrible sight, with overthrown tanks, like ante-diluvian monsters, brooding over the desolate, shell-pitted scene. Had the Devil wished to create a

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dreary waste of a fair land he could have done no better than did the Hun with smiling Picardy. It was a scene calculated to sink the cheeriest soul into the profoundest gloom.

We found, on arrival at Doullens, that the day's "leave" train, being hours overdue, had not yet come along! We could, therefore, reach Boulogne that night and cross the Channel the very next morning! Marvellous travel for those days, and quite unprecedented—excepting for Generals and Staff Officers able to command their own cars for the entire journey.

At Boulogne we found ourselves in the middle of an air raid. All lights were out and everyone had gone to ground. The Officers' Club could offer no quarters, so the Colonel took me to the Senior Officers' Club, and told the porter, with a wink, that I was a Field Officer. This piece of diplomacy found me a bed in a room with a man from the Italian front, who very kindly passed on to me the worst of colds.

A rough Channel crossing brought us to London, and myself to Cox's, from whose warehouse I extracted a twelve bore which had been stored in Egypt for more than a year, and had only arrived the week before. This was lucky, also the fact that a relation had taken a shoot, especially for my leave. So, on a Berkshire farm one was able to forget, for a time, the Hun and all his works.

The return to duty by the ordinary leave train was a new experience to me, and to return in the middle of a great advance was another. It also meant returning to a moving and, therefore, indefinite goal, with the only obvious course the nosing out of the Divisional area.

Boulogne was crowded, and I could not even get an armchair for the night at the Club. Finally the

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fiftieth hotel, as it seemed, offered a bed, and early the next morning I left for Achiet. In the grey dawn I could find no one to carry my valise, and so appealed to a chance, hard-bitten Highlander. "Well," said he, in very broad Scotch, "as you ask me if I will, instead of ordering me, I will do it gladly." A man with the right spirit.

At Achiet a number of Gunner Officers and I tumbled out and spent the night on the floor of a huge marquee. The place was crawling with officers, some on chairs, some on the floor. There happened to be two chairs left, though to get to them meant treading on the heads or bodies of tired men, who grunted and went to sleep again.

Here, too, I found one of our officers returning to the battalion, so we joined forces for the rest of the trip, which proved incredibly slow, and very dangerous. The retiring enemy had mined the line with delayed action mines which could not be found, and at any moment bits of the line might ascend as they had actually been doing for the past week.

Cambrai we reached at twelve a.m., a jumble of ruined houses, and in but little better state than Bapaume. Here, however, we learned that our Division was somewhere in the district of Boussières, and about ten miles out of Cambrai.

But there was nowhere to sleep, so we returned to the train; were turned out of that; got into an empty hospital train, and there were left undisturbed for the remainder of the night.

The next morning found us walking, foodless, for some miles, till we eventually found the Corps "Club," a primitive thing in clubs, but capable of providing food. Our next happy find was an officer from our battalion—who had been created Town Major of Boussières—and a warm invitation for the night at his billet.

A lorry took us next day into the town of

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Bévillers, where the battalion rested in billets, and seated in the Orderly Room was a young-looking man who proved to be our new, temporary C.O. He was a Regular, and had, we heard later, led the battalion with great success in the only engagement it had been in during our absence—the successful capture, in conjunction with the York and Lancasters, of the town Solèsmes, and carried out with very few casualties.

It was a very different sort of active service to which we returned. Instead of the barren, billetless district west of Cambrai we had entered, with the taking of the Canal de St Quentin at Marcoing, the comparatively uninjured area of towns and villages, with the inhabitants living in it. So, no more dugouts for us!

The battalion spent several days at Bévillers, during which our old C.O. returned, but left again to temporarily command the Brigade. Orders then arrived to march to Solèsmes, where we were quartered in a great barrack of a house. On the march to Escarmain on the following night I again took command of Headquarters Company, but began to feel very shaky by reason of a chill, and could hardly keep going, despite nips from a brandy flask.

Our route was congested with troops, all moving up to the front, and a jam took place at the cross roads leading off to Escarmain. To add to the general discomfort the enemy started shelling this area, and landed one or two close to us. A mounted officer, gaily conversing with a mounted policeman at these cross roads, evidently thought discretion the better part of valour, for, very quickly, dust upon the road to Escarmain was all that we could see of him; whilst we poor foot-sloggers could only stand and hope for the best. The enemy, however, soon tired of it; in time the jam resolved itself, and, by



imperceptible gradations, we moved, sometimes in Indian file, into the same town.

As we drew near a lurid glow lit the sky. Brigade Headquarters had just been set on fire, and those already in Escarmain were having a pretty warm time. Our mounted friend must have just got there in time for "the show," and, probably, already repented his celerity.

The following night, under the command of our old Colonel, the battalion moved once again to the attack in the neighbourhood of Le Quesnoy: and no sooner had it marched out than shells began to whistle around those of us left behind at Escarmain.

The fighting at Le Quesnoy was indicative of the rapid collapse that was now taking place in the enemy's ranks. An enforced halt, in an awkward position between a railway embankment and a swamp, whilst waiting to launch the attack, caused numerous casualties. When the hour struck, however, a steep wooded ravine was carried, in the teeth of the enemy's barrage, and the further slope beyond was surmounted in spite of heavy machine-gun fire, the final objective—the Orsinval-Le Quesnoy road—being gained in little more than three hours after "zero"; in which time the battalion had captured no less than three hundred prisoners, as well as a quantity of machine-guns.

That same afternoon orders arrived to move Rear Headquarters to Ruèsnes, and I rode off, with the Staff Captain and Brigade Transport Officer, to find bivouac or billet. We found every barn in Ruèsnes occupied, and so had to make up our minds to settle down in either open field or orchard. It was going to be a very cold night, and the thought came to me that this "open-air treatment," after billets, might prove disastrous. Officers of other battalions had "acquired" perches in Ruèsnes, and the Staff Captain advised me to do the same. But even

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temporary desertion of the men was not quite our way in the battalion, apart from the fact that I had already happened to overhear our late temporary C.O. comment on the action of some of these officers—they belonged to his own regiment—and contrast the same to our benefit.

Anyway it was a bitter, wet night, though we managed to survive with the help of a tarpaulin. October had arrived, and this in the open, on the French uplands, has no likeness to the South Sea Islands! Nor had the big gun perched just behind our orchard any relation to the tranquillity of the same. In fact one is inclined to date a slight deafness from that night outside Ruèsnes.

In the middle of the night orders from the Brigade arrived; and those who have also struggled with such—written in pencil—under a dripping tarpaulin, by the light of an electric torch, will sympathise.

Early on the following morning we started on a long forward march, and, at the end of many weary miles, settled down about midday in an orchard, under a heavy downpour, to await further orders. When these arrived we learned that we were to join the battalion at Hitonsart. So before us stretched many more rainy miles, but mostly downhill, and through considerable villages.

The first thing I bumped up against in Hitonsart was a big German howitzer, and I had barely time to look at it when up came a big "Brass Hat," to ask the battalion I belonged to. "The Hampshires, sir." "Very well, remember this is your gun. You have as much right to it as anyone. Put your battalion's name on it." "Very good, sir." So the Pioneer Sergeant was told to paint in the name and I entered the village "pub," where our Battalion Headquarters were billeted. But the Colonel told me that we could not very well claim the gun, as the

Devons, if anybody, had the better right to it, and the painting order was rescinded.

Again the battalion pushed on, and immediately the Hun began to shell Hitonsart. It was not long, however, before the French refugees began returning to their homes, delighted to be delivered from the Boches, voluble and hilarious, but we were sadly in their way, as we could see, for there was nothing like house-room enough for all.

Our route now lay through the great Forêt de Mormal, with the roads badly broken up and congested with traffic, but it was evident that the Boche was now on the run, and everybody was of cheerful countenance in consequence.

The battalion had already attacked and taken the village of Gogneaux, in spite of considerable resistance, and without great loss. The attack was made under grave disadvantage as no supporting barrage was available, and, in any event, the villages could not have been shelled, owing to the fact that the civilian population were still in occupation. Heavy enfilading fire was experienced from the left flank, but the attack was successfully pressed through the surrounding orchards, and a number of the enemy were accounted for.

In this action one officer led his platoon with such dash that he took an isolated position well in advance of the rest of the battalion, and, though exposed to enfilade fire, held on so staunchly that the following Companies were able to come up on his right flank and take up a position on the main road, which constituted the final objective for the Brigade. This fine advance led to the receipt of warm congratulations from the Guards Division which had been appreciative witnesses.

The village of Obies was our billet that night, and a rousing welcome came from the inhabitants, who had just previously decked the streets with flags

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and treated the men of the battalion to coffee; giving them almost too hearty a reception for comfort.

The following day saw us marching on to Gogneaux, to join up with the battalion.

Here the Brigadier came in to tea to discuss with the Colonel a plan of attack for the next morning, and it would have made the peace time soldier's blood run cold to hear the casual way in which these vital matters were treated. But the Brigadier and Colonel knew, and thoroughly understood, one another, the consequence being that there was a very elastic margin allowed for the latter's initiative. Neither could have known very much about the position, or what lay behind it, but both knew that the enemy was at last on the run, and that the great thing was to see that he kept it up.

The battalion started away from Gogneaux towards Petit Mênnil, on the outskirts of Maubeuge, at an early hour on November 8th, and Rear Headquarters followed an hour or two later. But the latter's surprise may be imagined when, after marching three or four miles, it found the battalion drawn up in a field by the roadside. There had been no attack for a very good reason. There was no enemy to attack!

So we left the battalion behind, and held on our way rejoicing. With Rear Headquarters leading it was pretty obvious that the situation had cleared up considerably, and that the end could not be far off.

We now began to find the road blown up in places by delayed action mines, and by the afternoon had reached Petit Mênnil; the battalion passing ahead to Sous-les-bois, also a suburb of Maubeuge.

About nine a.m. on the morning of November 9th we left our billets at Petit Mênnil to march into Maubeuge, and one of our Company Commanders and I—the last two officers from amongst all those

who had sailed with the battalion in December, 1914—rode into that town together.

A pontoon bridge had been hastily thrown over the river by our Sappers to replace the one the enemy had destroyed in retreat, and we eventually found Battalion Headquarters established in St Lazare, in a most luxurious billet, with a beautiful lawn in front, and the battalion's Colours flying at the entrance.

After breakfast, two days later, the Adjutant and I were in the Orderly Room, attending to various matters, when the regular morning despatches arrived from the Brigade, and, before we had turned to deal with them, the Second-in-Command came in; for it was his wont to skim with butterfly grace any correspondence that might attract his attention. Our only plan, during such visits, was to suspend work, crack a joke or two, or be studiously busy.

On this occasion his hand closed on an ordinary-looking wire from among the Brigade's morning effusions. This he read, and then observed sarcastically, "Ah, I suppose the Orderly Room did not consider this worth while to open. Isn't that just like them." The message ran:

"—— Battalion Hampshire Regiment. Hostilities will cease at eleven a.m. this morning.

"(Signed) STAFF CAPTAIN,

"—— *Brigade, 11/11/18.*"

He had scored, but never had he more cheaply, for never did the victims mind less.

Those at home, who collected in crowds, and went delirious with joy, probably imagined that similar scenes were being enacted at the front. In point of fact, and in our sector, there was no show of enthusiasm whatsoever. Not a dog barked; not

## WANDERINGS OF A TEMPORARY WARRIOR

a man threw his cap in the air. None the less there was the deepest thankfulness that it was all over, and that no more lives were to be sacrificed on an altar whose toll had latterly been heavier, and more frequent, than at any previous period of history.

The battalion's record since it left Palestine had been as follows :

### Casualties :

Killed		Wounded		Missing	TOTAL 998
O.	O.R.	O.	O.R.	O.R.	
5	135	23	654	181	

### Honours :

D.S.O. and Bar	M.C. and Bars	D.C.M. and Bar	M.S.M.	M.M. and Bars	Croix de Guerre	Medaille Militaire	Mentions
4	21	12	3	137	4	1	4
							(apart from automatic)

In addition, it had sent seven hundred (all ranks) to fight in Mesopotamia; had taken its full share of garrison duty in India, and had also supplied a draft of two hundred men for another Hampshire battalion in Palestine.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE MARCH TO THE RHINE

*November 12th, 1918—December 16th, 1918*

" Yet in flight lies safety; Teuton and Hun,  
From the banks of the Rhine to the Danube's shore,  
And back to the banks of the Rhine once more,  
Retreat from the face of the armèd foe,  
Robbing garden and hen roost where'er you go."  
—A. L. Gordon.

WE had walked into Maubeuge, instead of attacking it, in conjunction with the Guards Brigade, and many were the felicitations exchanged between the Mayor and the G.O.C. the Guards. Their band discoursed sweet music in the public square, and my C.O. and I went to listen. The populace were wild with delight at our entry, and, as may be supposed, there was no trouble in the matter of billets. It was a matter for pride, too, that when the Armistice "broke out" it found our battalion right in the forefront, and in touch with a flying enemy.

One evening a little later, whilst comfortably sitting at tea, a Staff Officer walked up the drive. The C.O. rose to greet him, and found, to his no small astonishment, a total stranger, but brought him in. Then was disclosed our old Brigade-Major of Palestine days, with whom I had had so many "passages" in the past, and from whom I had last parted when riding off to join Divisional Headquarters before Gaza. Although I was the only

officer present whom he knew he seemed glad to see the Hampshires again, and had actually tracked us by the Colours flying at our gate. He was now Brigade-Major to another Brigade which had taken part in the recent fighting.

Maubeuge itself, encompassed by its fortified walls, was interesting and mediaeval looking. All the bridges had been blown up, but our Sappers soon extemporised fresh ones. The town itself had not suffered much, and, as far as we could see, not at all from our own airmen, although it had formed a most important railway centre for the enemy. In any case there could be found no trace of any effect from a portion of the "tons" of bombs which were reported as having been dropped on important railheads.

The Huns had, of course, drunk the inhabitants dry before clearing out, and many stories went the round of their valour with the good red wine from Maubeuge cellars. It is also reported that when we commenced to hammer at the gates their thirst waxed mightily, and that whole cellars were requisitioned to screw them "to the sticking point."

The Divisional General came a little later to address us on the altered conditions, and explained how difficult it would be to keep up discipline on the rebound from intensive service, also that great schemes of education had begun to be outlined for occupying the men.

It would have been a great boon to have been able to rest for a time in this pleasant city, with our Companies posted, as they were, on the outskirts. But this was not to be, for news had come that we were off again, and that we were, in fact, to form a part of the Army of Occupation.

The Hun had been allowed a few days' start to get away bag and baggage, and we were now to be after him again, with our noses pointed straight for



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the Fatherland. Those seemingly ridiculous, one-time aspirations cherished by many good Territorials of marching triumphantly down "Unter Den Linden," were, it seemed, about to materialise. Worn out or bad marching men had to be left in France, and it was a slightly revised battalion that set out from Maubeuge on the 18th of November, 1918, as part of the 4th Army in its march to the Rhine.

On a fine, cold, sunny morning with a snap in the air, and the band playing bravely, it looked as though the march would be cheerful and enjoyable. But march discipline had to be tightened up, and we were expected to turn out as smart as possible to create a good impression.

At Consolre, where we spent the first night, we were still in Belgium. The weather showed signs of breaking, but we managed to cross the Franco-Belgian frontier in fine weather, at midday of the 20th, and came to Ragnies. Here was little sign of the German withdrawal, for practically nothing had been abandoned or thrown away. On the contrary, so far as our information went, the enemy had managed to take with them a good deal of produce from the countryside. The gardens and hen roosts had also yielded further toll to the freebooter—but for the last time.

Good use had been made of those few days' grace, and it is a matter for wonder that these beaten and disheartened troops got away as they did. But it will be less difficult to imagine the difference between the receptions accorded to them and to us by the Belgians. The latter was wildly enthusiastic. Triumphal arches, flowers, and decorations welcomed us on arrival at every village; the inhabitants turning out in strength. So great was the enthusiasm that our Divisional General was, I believe, greeted with an embarrassing ardour, which must have

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culminated before we arrived, for we were allowed to pass without any public embraces from the fair sex.

From Ragnies we had a longer march of twenty kilometres to Tarcienne, and our entry was rather pathetic, but amusing. Half a mile out we were met by an extemporised village band. Now our own band was on duty to play us in, and we fully expected the Brigadier to be waiting to take the salute as we marched past. The amateur band, however, insisted on accompanying us, and the consequent din became so amazing that it entirely upset the step of the tired troops. It then became necessary to explain to them that it would be well for them to desist, and this at last they did, so allowing us to march in, in good order.

Tarcienne is a pleasant little town, and I was lucky in being billeted on the Curé, with the C.O. and Second-in-Command. Outside, an immense park of German guns and limbers had been dumped for us to take over.

The country about was picturesque and agricultural, and not, apparently, the worse for war, excepting for an occasional dismantled beetroot factory. Our "drums" used to play at "retreat" here, to please the Brigadier who was immensely keen on drumming, and a great expert himself with the sticks. In fact, the story goes that, when in India with his battalion of the Gordon Highlanders, it was his habit to beat a drum throughout the long marches when one station was exchanged for another. It was in Tarcienne, too, that the wonders of the new educational scheme were expounded, and I appointed "Demobilisation Officer," little recking the pitfalls strewn upon that path.

On the 24th we moved to the little village of Devant-les-Bois, and Headquarters Mess was again placed in the house of the Curé. My own billet

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stood on the opposite side of the village green, and my wants were assiduously attended to by the daughters of the house. This latter fact so excited the envy of our susceptible Medical Officer (U.S.A.) that I caught him in the Orderly Room engaged in an endeavour to trace my resting place. He never discovered it!

The Curé was full of interesting stories of the Germans during their occupation, which were anything but to their credit. He also, the next morning, arranged a little procession of villagers, carrying his Church banner, and, with himself at their head, marched for a while in front of the battalion. On the outskirts of the village his little company drew to one side, and wished us "God speed." It was a thoughtful and touching act.

That afternoon, wet to the skin, we reached the considerable town of St Gerrard, where I had the luck to be quartered in the house of a good dame who enjoyed the blessing of electric light; a welcome change after the candle-dips of bivouacs and dug-outs. It was well for us that we could now sleep under cover, for the weather had broken, and was, in addition, very cold.

On again for another twenty kilometres to Evrehailles, by way of a deep valley and a traverse of the Meuse and its bridge at Ivroir. And what a fine line of defence had the enemy been in condition to fall back upon it in time!

It was at Evrehailles that I was considerably cheered by a sudden remark of the C.O.'s at dinner that two officers were shortly to be sent home, with a Colour party, to bring out the Battalion Colours to Germany. He also added, "Bacon, I think, shall go." Naturally I was delighted, and immediately saw myself due for a week's home leave, which was to be the guerdon of the party.

From Evrehailles we marched on, eighteen wet

kilometres, to Barcenal, over dreary, moorland waste, with mist and rain blotting out everything. A lonely crucifix standing, circled in mist, at the top of a long hill, jumps, even now, to memory as marking the most exhausting point of the whole of this march.

At Barcenal, our next halt for twelve days, Battalion Headquarters was billeted in the Château de Barcenal; and the hospitable Comte de Viller-mont welcomed us with old-world courtesy. But here disappointment awaited me, for the Second-in-Command was now sent in charge of the Colour party. My disappointment was the greater because, the evening before the battalion left Winchester for India in 1914, I was one of two subalterns selected to deposit our Colours in safe custody in the Hampshire dépôt, and naturally felt that it would have been appropriate to have been delegated the duty of recovering and bringing them out to Germany.

The deposition of our Colours in 1914 had had its humorous side, for on that occasion the Adjutant had impressed upon us strongly that the Regulars at the dépôt would probably make great ceremonial of the handing over, and that we were to be prepared to play up to it. We thereupon marched solemnly down, with our Colours and two Colour-Sergeants, from the Castle. But when, on arrival at Dépôt Headquarters, we asked impressively for the Officer Commanding, we were informed that he was at tea. "What are we to do then?" we asked. "Oh, he'll be back presently," was the reply.

When the great man returned he quietly unlocked a door, said, "Bring them in here, and put them up on that shelf"—and it was all over. Not a heel had clicked! Our feelings were naturally hurt, but we suggested the advisability of a receipt. "Oh yes," he said, "perhaps that would be as well." And we got it.

At the Château de Barcenal there was much

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festivity, but when the daughters of the house discovered that a fine selection of red tabs was procurable in the neighbourhood the lure was too strong for them, and the modest, regimental foot-slogger was promptly discarded. But even the Staff Officer became cheap when real, live Generals proved complaisant enough to join the revels. In the circumstances some of us were not too sorry, when the time came, to take the road again upon our lawful occasions.

The Comte, who always remained the same charming French host, once or twice hinted that he might be able to dig out a shot-gun which had taken refuge from the enemy in the cellars, and so give one a chance at a pheasant, but the suggestion never materialised. As a matter of fact little or no game remained on his preserves after the invading host had passed.

The account the family gave us of their experiences with the German officers was amusing. Nothing more than inconvenience seems to have been suffered, for these officers had been relegated to separate quarters for their meals. But on arrival or departure these Junkers would go through the most formal salutations, with much heel clicking, bowing and attendant ceremonial.

On one occasion, whilst here, we made up a party of officers and N.C.O.'s for a lorry trip to Dinant, and were all mightily struck with the magnificent view over the Meuse from the famous Castle. Our guide also regaled us with an account of the terrible doings of the Hun when he overwhelmed this peaceful town. Pointing down to a spot by the river he told us that there the unprotected inhabitants had been collected, in a mass, and fired on by these brutes. Following this act, all who could rise were ordered to get up, at the same time being told that they would be spared, and that, as the wounded

and bleeding raised themselves from among the slaughtered, another ruthless storm of bullets was directed at that mangled mass of humanity, until the last survivor was laid low.

The town itself, at this date, was considerably shattered, but to nothing like the same extent as other towns of Northern France. The towns would soon recover, but never to forget those days of blood and brutal savagery.

The Companies, who occupied the hamlets surrounding Barcenal, were not sorry when the order came for another forward move, and the next hamlet to see us was Mohiville. It was while here that our voting papers arrived, having triumphed over all obstacles. The politicians had actually caught us on the march, and were informing us that our chance had now arrived to vote for a government that could make dear old England "A land fit for. . . ." But no—this simple chronicle shall not digress for party politics! The papers were served out to the Companies in billet, and in the dark of a late autumn night. I wonder how many of the men voted!

So we marched, ever forward to the Rhine. To Bonsin, then on to Filôt, and from that small town to Werbomont. Here we were brought, for the first time, within the movement for demobilisation. Urgent wires began to arrive for the immediate dispatch of all coal miners, and, though a south county battalion, we had a few, so packed them off, with all necessary papers filled in.

This, however, was but a foretaste of what was in store, and it would seem that this move was the outcome of "clear and steady thought" on the part of some bright soul sitting at General Headquarters. But it also meant that the only valid reason for demobilisation the soldier understood—duration of service—was to be scrapped, whilst industrial necessity was to take its place.

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Now it is my experience that Tommy will bear anything but injustice, and that, sometimes, in stark loyalty to his uniform he will bear this also. But, reduced to cold fact, it now meant that the latest conscript who had never smelt powder was to be preferred, in a multitude of cases, before the man who had left all that was dear to him, and rushed to the Colours, in 1914.

The "clear thinker" in question doubtless got the D.S.O., whilst the duty of attempting to explain and justify these clear thoughts to the indignant victims was left to me in respect of my own battalion. In any case, off went the miners, and it cannot be said that their subsequent methods benefited their country to any extent.

From Werbomont we marched on to Grand Halleux, a distance of twenty-five kilometres; the longest stretch we had so far done.

Ever since we left the château I had ridden in rear of the battalion as Second-in-Command, though, up to that point, I had marched in front with Headquarters Company. The consequence being that whilst I now had a horse I had not the companionship of the C.O., and, moreover, the responsibility for stragglers. But, for a man on a horse to persuade another on foot, with a heavy pack, to bear up, seemed scarcely cricket, and, more than once, I very nearly made up my mind to complete the march on foot—but not quite!

At Grand Halleux we were able to stow the whole battalion away in the great "Johanninum Institute," an immense building, which could have accommodated even greater numbers; and at eleven o'clock on the morning of the 16th December, 1918, we crossed the German frontier, at Poteau, to the tune of the Hampshire Regimental March.

So the strains which had awakened the echoes in the hills round Quetta, survived the dust and heat

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of Egypt and Palestine, cheered us back from the Marne, and encouraged us through Belgium, now rang out in triumph on German soil.

It was a proud moment for all of us! And a thankful moment for me; for I was now the sole surviving officer left to the battalion out of all those who had sailed for India on December 12th, 1914.



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE ARMY OF THE RHINE

*December 16th, 1918—April 5th, 1919*

*"Parcere subjectis et debellare superbos."*

SOON after crossing the frontier a body of Mounted Police passed at a trot, and were accorded such an ironical reception from the marching troops that one of them was barely able to hold in his horse. It was surprising to find how thoroughly unpopular they were, and that the jests at their expense were practically all directed to the fact that all fighting being over these guardians of the peace were now gallantly galloping to the front.

The same attitude seems to have been taken up by officers in respect of Provost-Marshals, who certainly were inclined, now and then, to be arrogant on the march; and who, on such occasions, were often sharply reminded that they had shown no such ferocity in the field, and so could not expect to be accorded undue deference now: in fact, that the quarter-deck manner must not follow too quickly upon active operations, or the exponent might lay himself open to unpleasant rebuffs.

After a short march we billeted at Recht, and found the Germans, on the whole, very anxious to please; but one old dame at least flatly refused to give up a badly needed room, and had to be brought to her senses by the C.O.

One of our runners, who had seen some hard

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service, and with the Military Medal to his credit, was frankly horrified at being told to sleep in a bed, and between sheets! Said he to the C.O., "But I am not to sleep here, sir?" "Oh yes, you are," said the C.O. And, for a time, the poor boy could not believe it. To my lot fell a bedroom through which the members of the household had to pass to their own. But then you know "Such things must be after a famous victory."

A march of twelve kilometres, next day, brought us to Heppenbach, where we remained for a time; and where we also met some portion of the German units who had fought against us at Havrincourt. They told us frankly that after that attack they felt it was all up. They were, for the most part, fine fellows.

A shoemaker in my billet here earned my admiration. In spite of the great inconvenience to which he must have been put by the incursion into his best rooms of three officers he steadily worked away from dawn till eve, and often after that till ten p.m. He showed amazing industry, and was evidently setting to work without waste of time to repair the horrors and disasters of the war.

Whilst here, on one occasion, we went shooting, with service rifles, in the great forest clothing the hill-sides, and persuaded our Brigadier to join us. We also enlisted the service of the *Jäger*—a very superior person, with a blackcock's feather in his Tyrolese hat. Roe deer and pig were said to be about, and enthusiastic beaters were, of course, as many as blackberries.

A very pleasant day in the forest it certainly was, but, though we saw tracks of pig, and the Transport Officer fired at a roe, we got nothing for our pains. I fancy the *Jäger* took very good care that we should get no chance of shooting his master's game, for when our men went out with

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their rifles they, at least, managed to bring home a roe or two.

Snow now began to fall, and marching orders arrived for Honsfeld. Two alternative routes also presented themselves; the shorter lay through the forest, and was reported by the Transport Officer to be impassable. We, however, determined to try it, and, the Adjutant being sick, I left the rear of the column and accompanied the C.O., who struck a good track through the forest, under a glorious sun. When clear of trees we found ourselves trekking over hard snow, with nothing in sight for miles like any Arctic expedition. A little later we began the descent into a valley, the weather turned very bad, and the roads were an abomination. Outside the shelter of the trees the blast came down upon us as icily as any I have known; which showed that the German winter was getting a good grip.

Twenty-two kilometres of this and, about night-fall, we reached Honsfeld, to find ourselves provided with the most luxurious billets. How great it would have been to have settled down in those beautiful woods, with their river flowing away down the valley. How we envied the gunners who had been allotted this little paradise.

The next day saw us at Kall, again with splendid billets in which to spend that Christmas Eve in comfort, and on Christmas morning the German, in his "blacks," starting for his conventicle, met our war-worn battalion setting out on its last march for Mechernich, the lead mining town that was to be our temporary German home.

We were, I remember, inclined to use hard words at the expense of the Staff for allotting us a mining town. Probably it was thought that as the greater portion of the Brigade came from industrial districts it might like to live in them again. For, although we were a south country battalion, it must

be remembered that practically the whole Division came from the mining and woollen districts of Yorkshire.

In any case we started out on this last stage of the march on a miserable, damp and sludgy morning, with the country rapidly deteriorating in character. Fine spruces and sparkling river fell rapidly behind, in company with our spirits, till, at length, we entered Mechernich, with our band bravely banging out the Regimental March.

At first sight Mechernich appeared squalid and miserable; a town possessed of what might well be called "slum" streets. Our billeting party, too, had experienced poor luck, for it had by no means finally arranged where we could all be stowed. Companies stood disconsolately at corners, and we felt that Christmas must be written down as a failure. A march of two hundred and eighty-seven kilometres for this!

But first impressions are often fallacious, and such proved to be the case with Mechernich. After a few days we found ourselves the only battalion left in the town, and, excepting for Brigade Headquarters, had the run of the place: so gradually discovered the best billets, and settled down comfortably. The Adjutant and I shared a good room in the enormous "Nunnery" which forms the great feature of the place, and there also we were allotted a palatial Orderly Room, and a smaller room for my Demobilisation Office. Headquarters Mess established itself in a small hotel, with room enough to dine the whole of the officers, so that a battalion Mess was inaugurated on two days of the week, and the town hospital provided quarters for our Medical Staff and its patients.

This Nunnery proved to be a place of innumerable activities. The Nuns were, of course, the chief feature; then came a species of monk, evidently



THE BATTALION, LED BY THE C.O., MARCHING TO HONSFELD.

THE ORDERLY ROOM, WERMELS KIRCHEN—OUR "FARTHEST EAST" IN GERMANY.



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attached in some capacity to the establishment. But, in addition, there was an elementary school, and, finally, what appeared to be a small lunatic asylum. Fine bath-rooms and large living and sleeping rooms completed this hive of industry, to which, on our arrival, may be added a Battalion Orderly Room, Demobilisation Office, and Transport Rooms. The Nuns proved very obliging, and, in fact, did everything we asked without a murmur.

During our stay of two or three months we had not the slightest trouble with the inhabitants, who seemed to accept the position philosophically. In fact, they showed genuine kindness to our men billeted in their houses, as instanced when, owing to the fact that the men's kits sadly needed replenishment, these Rhinelanders lent them their own underclothing, whilst they were, at the same time, washing that of our men.

The Brigadier came down one day, during parade hours, to find football in full swing, and, happening to be present, I was required to explain the situation. I think he entirely concurred with our methods, for no one understands better than the Regular how necessary it is to keep the young soldier interested and cheery.

It was whilst billeted here that I received a letter from Sir Malcolm Grover—our Divisional Commander while in India—from which I must give an extract if only to show the keen interest this distinguished soldier always took in the Territorial Battalion which had been trained under his auspices, and with his encouragement.

"I was more than pleased," he wrote, "by getting your letter of the 13th instant, and to hear of the (battalion) who have done so well, and in whom I always feel the greatest interest. It seems only the other day when I saw them marching into

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Quetta on their first arrival, when practically all ranks were recruits; and to you personally, the only officer who went out with the battalion, and have stuck it out right through, the experience must seem wonderful. I feel that I cannot congratulate you enough on your own distinguished record which you cannot help feeling very great satisfaction in looking back to. . . . It is a fine regiment and I hope that I may meet some of them again in all ranks. . . . I hope that it will not be very long before they release you, as you, and others like you, will be wanting to get back to your ordinary professions. Though now you will come back with added glamour, and, I hope, many decorations which you have so well earned."

It was an inspiring letter for a Territorial to receive, and it breathed in every line the kind and generous encouragement of a fine Regular to his humble brother-in-arms.

It was whilst engaged with ice-hockey, and immediately prior to the C.O.'s leave to England, that the Staff Captain appeared with news of a serious character. We were ordered to send two hundred of all ranks to a battalion of the Hampshires near Cologne. He also opined that the C.O. would not take leave in these circumstances. To select these men would be an invidious task, and all the C.O.'s popularity might be required to make the bitter pill palatable to those selected to go. But it was obvious that the C.O. was determined to get his leave if possible. "Who would you leave in command?" asked the Staff Captain. "Bacon," replied the C.O. "I thought so," said the Staff Captain. But I fervently hoped the C.O. would find it in his composition to stay and see this trouble through. We three thereupon adjourned to the Brigade, and there the Brigade-Major, to my relief, "supposed that the C.O. would stay for a



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bit." The C.O. went to see the Brigadier—then ill in bed—and on return announced that the Brigadier had said it would be quite all right, and that he could go. So we went that night down to the Orderly Room, prepared a roll of those selected for the duty, the C.O. addressed the battalion next day, and went on leave.

I had got the miserable job after all, and, to make matters worse, the Adjutant went down that day with influenza. Nor, owing to the job, did I feel so much satisfaction as I otherwise should have done in issuing Battalion Orders as "Commanding the ——— Battalion Hampshire Regiment"; but I can now look back with pride on the concrete fact that the Second-Lieutenant of 1914 had the honour of holding command, however briefly, and that, too, in Germany. *Non cuivis homini contingit.*

In a day or two our Second-in-Command—he who had been dispatched for the Colours, and had hardly been expected back again—turned up, frozen to the marrow, and very unhappy. His mission had proved a failure, for the Colours had not been allowed to leave Winchester. He had then tried to be demobilised, but, after an absence of six or eight weeks instead of one, had been cast back again into the great army machine. Hardly had he returned when I succumbed to influenza; in order, I suppose, to emphasise the fact that I had never been actually sick since joining the Army.

From Mechernich it was my duty to journey one day, with the Staff Captain, to meet a commission out from home to advise the soldier on his best chance of getting back to work in the old country. Among them sat a gentleman who held forth in a superior manner for a terribly long time; the burden of the discourse being, "If you had a job when you joined the Army get back to it if possible."

The country round Mechernich, when it came

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to be explored, proved quite interesting, with its pleasant woodlands and quaint black and white villages. The lead mining industry, though still carried on, was a bad second to a railway wagon manufactory, which the provident Directors had started, at first as a supplementary occupation during hard times, but which had, at this date, become by far the more important of the two. The whole concern was certainly profitable, for it employed a large number of men and girls.

Soon after our draft of two hundred had left us orders arrived to move beyond the Rhine into the Bridgehead by Solingen, the iron and steel industrial district north-east of Cologne. We had already visited Cologne occasionally from Mechernich, and found an apparently prosperous city, with splendid shops, and cheap goods of excellent quality. Personally I saw no sign of want or distress among the population. The trains were full to the roof, and, in fact, a small German boy once occupied the rack of my carriage.

On boarding the train one day at Mechernich I found the carriage filled with bulky Germans, and indicated to a stout Lutheran Padre that his room was required. He bundled out on to the platform submissively enough, as did the next Hun to him, and we travelled in comfort. But I must confess that I felt some compunction at the next station when I saw the same Padre bundled out again by another officer.

The trams at Bonn were the last word in luxury, their pace that of an express train. I was also struck by the following incident in one of them, which would seem to throw some light on the German attitude, sex to sex. A middle-aged man of the lower class had boarded the tram, and stood seatless, whereupon all eyes of both sexes were immediately directed upon a good-looking girl of

about twenty, evidently of the superior class. This silent pressure of public opinion had its result, for she at last rose and gave up her seat to the man, who took it as his right. It was obviously all strictly *en règle* from the Teutonic point of view. Man here is evidently the master of his household in something more than name.

Another fact was also patent. The people of Bonn were certainly, though indefinably, more hostile than elsewhere in Rhineland, and no doubt the professorial element accounted for this. No open hostility was shown, but one could not help having a subtle feeling that it was there in a tense though suppressed form. A clean, pleasant town, none the less, with a Canadian gun trained on the river. This, with its attendant crew, stood as agreeable evidence that the Hun had actually been brought to heel.

As to Cologne, our occupation appeared to arouse feelings rather of pleasure than of rancour; and when a magnificent car passed and a superbly uniformed officer saluted, it required some effort to return the salute with nonchalance. So far as one could see Cologne appeared to play the game, and accept facts with a good grace. Doubtless they were glad, even with the verdict against them, that the awful business had been settled at last.

When the time came we were sorry to leave Mechernich, for it involved parting from our Brigadier and his staff, and leaving the 62nd Division. We had been proud of our Division, and it had meant something that a south country battalion pitchforked into the midst of Yorkshiremen had been well received, and that all had worked so well together to a victorious conclusion.

We also left the townspeople with some feelings of regret, and when we entrained a large contingent of them assembled at the station to see us off, rather

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to the confusion of the Brigadier, who said in his gruff way, "What's the meaning of it?"

Even the little boys refused to allow our men to clean out the billets they were leaving, seizing the brooms from their hands, and telling them that they would do it. Sturdy little fellows they were, and fine material for hefty machine-gunners some day. A spectator might have thought the occasion a parting of friends. In this manner did we steam slowly away, leaving Mechernich to the tender mercies of a kilted Highland battalion.

Crossing the Rhine we ran on for about twenty miles north-east of Cologne, and detrained at Wermelskirchen, a medium sized town on the borders of the Solingen country, and facing the large industrial town of Ramschied. Here we relieved the 2nd Battalion of our own regiment, the "regular" portion of which proceeded to England, whilst the "new army" portion was absorbed, a few days later, into our battalion.

But hardly had we arrived when a General Staff Officer from our new Division visited us, and asked me whether he was correct in assuming that our whole battalion consisted of "retainable" men; i.e., conscripts who could not yet be demobilised. I told him that, on the contrary, practically the whole of them were eligible for immediate demobilisation. "Well then," said he, "they should not have sent you here into the outpost line; for no battalion here, when its strength falls below six hundred, can demobilise a single man!"

This was cheerful news for men who had been half over Asia, a small slice of Europe, and were now itching to get back to Hampshire! We were below the six hundred mark owing to the enforced dispatch of the draft of two hundred from Mechernich, and this draft contained, of course, our "retainable" men. So, to fully complete the mysterious happen-

ing it is but necessary to record that our draft was now returned us by the battalion to whom it had been sent!

Our Second-in-Command now "went sick," and on the eve of intelligence that the new Brigadier, and then the new Corps Commander, were coming to inspect the battalion. This, of course, meant that I was let in for the command of the battalion at the first inspection, but I am glad to remember that we gave the Brigadier a good impression on parade; the Corps Commander spared us his inspection owing to an amazingly wet spell of weather.

At the end of a fortnight here we were sent to Dhünn, and there once more returned to primitive village billets, which, following our late life of luxury, came as rather a shock. A few small trout in the forest streams gave promise of some sport at the proper season, but beyond an occasional glimpse of a deer there was nothing else in this district which seemed likely to help us in passing away the time with rod or gun.

On the outpost line a rigid rule was enforced that all Germans must take off their hats to officers, and they fell quite easily into the custom. Even a forest worker, a hundred yards away, would be seen to cease work and doff his hat. It may seem trivial, but the rule had its salutary effect.

Here the people certainly struck one as dignified, hard working and respectable, nor were there any surface indications of penury or starvation. Work in the forests, and weaving, appeared to form the staple occupations. The Rhinelanders are said to be the most civilised of all the German States welded into the modern Empire of Germany. Indications were not wanting, however, that they were loyal in spirit to the Junker element of East Prussia, and were, no doubt, well impregnated with the pernicious

## WANDERINGS OF A TEMPORARY WARRIOR

doctrines of the Professor class. It may be, on the other hand, that these dwellers by the Rhine would have welcomed the division of their Empire into its component parts had it been economically possible: for, stripped as they were then of past delusions, they clearly showed themselves men of worth and of some integrity.

The Colonel now returned from leave, announcing that he was going to be demobilised, but had returned to see that some of the battalion's old stagers got away first—for which those same old stagers were mighty grateful. He was also good enough to make special efforts on my behalf, knowing how keen I was to get to England before all civilian jobs had been filled.

Though few in the Army realised it there never was a time when it was more important, particularly for the professional man, to return and get re-established before the market was completely glutted. Thrice fortunate were those who had managed to get their freedom on the proclamation of the Armistice. But we could at least pride ourselves upon the fact that we had marched in arms to the Rhine, an historic fact that may never be repeated in this country's history.

My last application, strongly backed by the C.O., bore fruit, and one cheery day a telegram arrived with orders to proceed to Cologne for demobilisation.

When I left the battalion there were not then with it more than half a dozen men of all ranks from among those who had sailed to India in 1914. In October the battalion ceased to exist; the "retainable" men were sent to the 51st Battalion, the remainder demobilised. It had, however, done its work, and, though it no longer figures in the Army list, it has left its little mark on history.

True to battalion tradition my last move took place on Sunday. Leaving Dhünn in wintry

## THE ARMY OF THE RHINE

weather I arrived in Cologne that evening. I was there told to report at a big military barracks at eight a.m. next morning, and to march a Company up to the station. So we marched, a blithesome Company too, through the streets of Rhineland's capital; entrained, and started out on our long journey to the coast.

The old French battle-fields round the Arras district showed, as yet, very little change from the grey war-ridden waste of our advance. Occasionally a plough could be seen at work, but the shell-holes were there. Refugees were slowly returning, and, with the help of the soldiers, clearing up, but the process must have been painful and laborious, and a vivid contrast to us who had seen the outward appearance of prosperity in that part of Germany we had just left. The spoiler had been just wily enough to escape spoliation by hasty surrender!

So to Dunkirk, with many formalities and much marching, till final disposal in a "rest" camp: where for two days I dragged out existence in an unheated hut—and the cold of it is in my bones as I write.

Finally came the Channel passage on a small boat crowded to the funnels with happy troops, and from which had just been disembarked one of the new garrison battalions formed to take our place in Germany. Never was an embarkation so smoothly, or quickly accomplished, and when, later, we saw the white cliffs of Dover loom through the mist we thanked God for His goodness—or, at any rate, some of us did.

It was a wonderful experience to be again among friendly porters and kind people, with chocolate and food packets for each returned wanderer. But, best of all, were the Kentish hop-fields and the smiling English landscape. A Gunner Major pointed to these, and made some short comment on the goodness of being once more in this pleasant

## WANDERINGS OF A TEMPORARY WARRIOR

land. And so we sat hugging the knowledge with a satisfaction too deep for expression, or reproduction in cold print.

As night fell we reached Fovant Camp on Salisbury Plain, and were here officially demobilised.

With my papers of discharge in my pocket I found myself, at last, on the much beloved little branch line which had so often taken me home on "leave out" from school, and reached the small, home station from which I had left four and a half, long years before to wander over three continents with the battalion.



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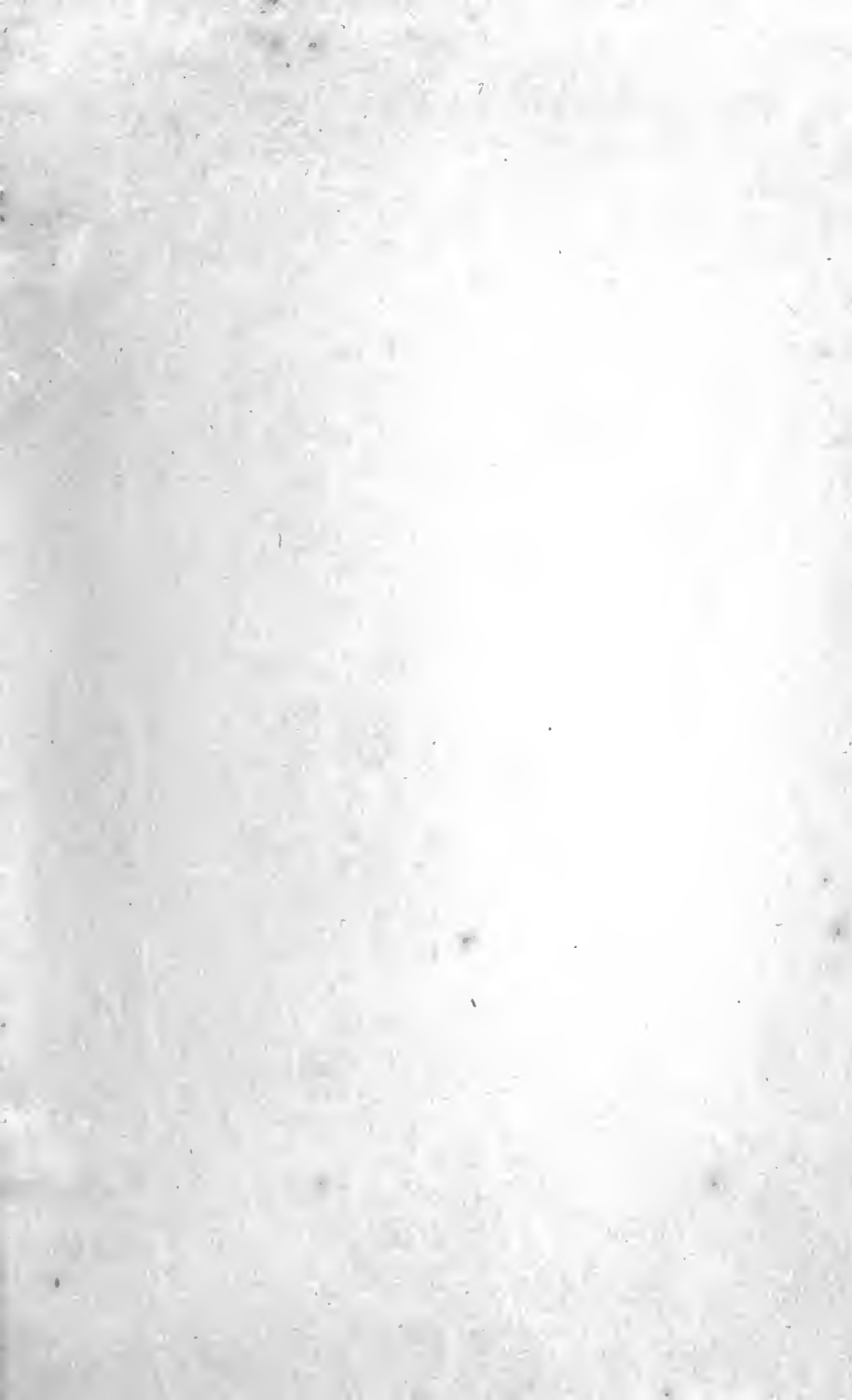
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